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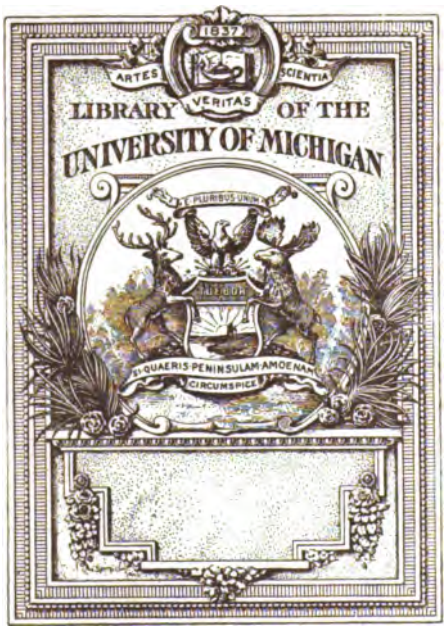
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THE WORKS AND LIFE OF WALTER BAGEHOT

Vol. III.

THE WORKS AND LIFE

OF

WALTER BAGEHOT

EDITED BY

MRS. RUSSELL BARRINGTON

THE WORKS IN NINE VOLUMES
THE LIFE IN ONE VOLUME
VOL. III. OF THE WORKS

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ERRATA.

Page 378, line 14, *for* eight *read* eighth
„ 379, „ 7, „ member *read* minister

BÉRANGER.[1]

(1857.)

THE invention of books has at least one great advantage. It has half-abolished one of the worst consequences of the diversity of languages. Literature enables nations to understand one another. Oral intercourse hardly does this. In English, a distinguished foreigner says not what he thinks, but what he can. There is a certain intimate essence of national meaning which is as untranslatable as good poetry. Dry thoughts are cosmopolitan; but the delicate associations of language which express character, the traits of speech which mark the man, differ in every tongue, so that there are not even cumbrous circumlocutions that are equivalent in another. National character is a deep thing—a shy thing; you cannot exhibit much of it to people who have a difficulty in understanding your language; you are in strange society, and you feel you will not be understood. "Let an English gentleman," writes Mr. Thackeray, "who has dwelt two, four, or ten years in Paris, say at the end of any given period how much he knows of French society, how many French houses he has entered, and how many French friends he has made. Intimacy there is none; we see but the outsides of the people. Year by year we live in France, and grow grey and see no more. We play *écarté* with Monsieur de Trêfle every night; but what do we know of the heart of the man—of the inward ways, thoughts,

[1] *Œuvres complètes de* C.-J. de Béranger. *Nouvelle édition, revue par l'Auteur, contenant les Dix Chansons nouvelles, le facsimile d'une Lettre de* Béranger; *illustrée de cinquante-deux gravures sur acier, d'après* Charlet, D'Aubigny, Johannot Grenier, De Lemud, Pauquet, Penguilly, Raffet, Sandoz, *exécutées par les artistes les plus distingués, et d'un beau portrait d'après nature par* Sandoz. 2 vols., 8vo, 1855.

and customs of Trêfle? We have danced with Countess Flicflac, Tuesdays and Thursdays, ever since the peace; and how far are we advanced in her acquaintance since we first twirled her round a room? We know her velvet gown and her diamonds; we know her smiles and her simpers and her rouge; but the real, rougeless, *intime* Flicflac we know not."[1] Even if our words did not stutter, as they do stutter on our tongue, she would not tell us what she is. Literature has half mended this. Books are exportable; the essence of national character lies flat on a printed page. Men of genius, with the impulses of solitude, produce works of art, whose words can be read and re-read and partially taken in by foreigners to whom they could never be uttered, the very thought of whose unsympathising faces would freeze them on the surface of the mind. Alexander Smith has accused poetical reviewers of beginning as far as possible from their subject. It may seem to some, though it is not so really, that we are exemplifying this saying in commencing as we have commenced an article on Béranger.

There are two kinds of poetry—which one may call poems of this world, and poems not of this world. We see a certain society on the earth held together by certain relations, performing certain acts, exhibiting certain phenomena, calling forth certain emotions. The millions of human beings who compose it have their various thoughts, feelings, and desires. They hate, act, and live. The social bond presses them closely together; and from their proximity new sentiments arise which are half superficial and do not touch the inmost soul, but which nevertheless are unspeakably important in the actual constitution of human nature, and work out their effects for good and for evil on the characters of those who are subjected to their influence. These sentiments of the world, as one may speak, differ from the more primitive impulses and emotions of our inner nature as the superficial phenomena of the material universe from what we fancy is its real essence. Passing hues, transient changes have their

[1] We have been obliged to abridge the above extract, and in so doing have left out the humour of it. (W. Bagehot.) [From the *Paris Sketch Book;* condensed from the section on some French fashionable novels.] (Forrest Morgan.)

course before our eyes; a multiplex diorama is for ever displayed; underneath it all we fancy—such is the inevitable constitution of our thinking faculty—a primitive, immovable essence, which is modified into all the ever-changing phenomena we see, which is the grey granite whereon they lie, the primary substance whose *débris* they all are. Just so from the original and primitive emotions of man, society—the evolving capacity of combined action—brings out desires which seem new, in a sense are new, which have no existence out of the society itself, are coloured by its customs at the moment, change with the fashions of the age. Such a principle is what we may call social gaiety: the love of combined amusement which all men feel and variously express, and which is to the higher faculties of the soul what a gay running stream is to the everlasting mountain—a light, altering element which beautifies while it modifies. Poetry does not shrink from expressing such feelings; on the contrary, their renovating cheerfulness blends appropriately with her inspiriting delight. Each age and each form of the stimulating imagination has a fashion of its own. Sir Walter sings in his modernised chivalry:—

"Waken, lords and ladies gay,
On the mountain dawns the day;
All the jolly chase is here,
With hawk and horse and hunting-spear.
Hounds are in their couples yelling,
Hawks are whistling, horns are knelling.
Merrily, merrily, mingle they:
Waken, lords and ladies gay.

"Louder, louder chant the lay,
Waken, lords and ladies gay;
Tell them youth and mirth and glee
Run a course as well as we.
Time, stern huntsman, who can balk?
Stanch as hound and fleet as hawk;
Think of this, and rise with day,
Gentle lords and ladies gay." [1]

[1] A separate lyric first published in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* for 1808, and republished in the collected edition of Scott's *Poetical Works* in 1830, under the title of "Hunting Song," vol. viii. p. 370.

The poet of the people "*vilain et très vilain*," sings with the pauper Bohemian :—

"Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir !
Vie errante
Est chose enivrante.
Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir !
Car tout voir, c'est tout conquérir.

"Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
De lois vaines,
De lourdes chaines ;
Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
Ni berceau, ni toit, ni cercueil.

"Mais croyez-en notre gaîté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître ;
Mais, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté.

"Oui, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître ;
Oui, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté." [1]

The forms of those poems of social amusement are, in truth, as various as the social amusement itself. The variety of the world, singularly various as it everywhere is, is nowhere so various as in that. Men have more ways of amusing themselves than of doing anything else they do. But the essence —the characteristic—of these poems everywhere is, that they express more or less well the lighter desires of human nature; —those that have least of unspeakable depth, partake most of what is perishable and earthly, and least of the immortal soul. The objects of these desires are social accidents; excellent, perhaps, essential, possibly—so is human nature made—in one form and variety or another, to the well-being of the soul, yet in themselves transitory, fleeting, and in other moods contemptible. The old saying was, that to endure solitude a man must either be a beast or a god.[2] It is in the lighter play of social

[1] *Les Bohémiens.*

[2] Bacon : Essay on "Friendship," quoting from Aristotle's *Politica*. (Forrest Morgan.)

action, in that which is neither animal nor divine, which in its half-way character is so natural to man, that these poems of society, which we have called poems of amusement, have their place.

This species does not, however, exhaust the whole class. Society gives rise to another sort of poems, differing from this one as contemplation differs from desire. Society may be thought of as an object. The varied scene of men,—their hopes, fears, anxieties, maxims, actions,—presents a sight more interesting to man than any other which has ever existed, or which can exist; and it may be viewed in all moods of mind, and with the change of inward emotion as the external object seems to change: not that it really does so, but that some sentiments are more favourable to clear-sightedness than others are; and some bring before us one aspect of the subject, and fix our attention upon it, others a different one, and bind our minds to that likewise. Among the most remarkable of these varied views is the world's view of itself. The world, such as it is, has made up its mind what it is. Childishly deceivable by charlatans on every other subject,—imposed on by pedantry, by new and unfounded science, by ancient and unfounded reputation, a prey to pomposity, overrun with recondite fools, ignorant of all else,—society knows itself. The world knows a man of the world. A certain tradition pervades it; a *disciplina* of the market-place teaches what the collective society of men has ever been, and what, so long as the nature of man is the same, it cannot and will not cease to be. Literature, the written expression of human nature in every variety, takes up this variety likewise. Ancient literature exhibits it from obvious causes in a more simple manner than modern literature can. Those who are brought up in times like the present necessarily hear a different set of opinions, fall in with other words, are under the shadow of a higher creed. In consequence, they cannot have the simple *naïveté* of the old world; they cannot speak with easy equanimity of the fugitiveness of life, the necessity of death, of goodness as a mean, of sin as an extreme. The theory of the universe has

ceased to be an open question. Still the spirit of Horace is alive, and as potent as that of any man. His tone is that of prime ministers; his easy philosophy is that of courts and parliaments; you may hear his words where no other foreign words are ever heard. He is but the extreme and perfect type of a whole class of writers, some of whom exist in every literary age, and who give an expression to what we may call the poetry of equanimity, that is, the world's view of itself; its self-satisfaction, its conviction that you must bear what comes, not hope for much, think *some* evil, never be excited, admire little, and then you will be at peace. This creed does not sound attractive in description. Nothing, it has been said, is so easy as to be "religious on paper": on the other hand, it is rather difficult to be worldly in speculation; the mind of man, when its daily maxims are put before it, revolts from anything so stupid, so mean, so poor. It requires a consummate art to reconcile men in print to that moderate and insidious philosophy which creeps into all hearts, colours all speech, influences all action. We may not stiffen common-sense into a creed; our very ambition forbids:—

> "It hears a voice within us tell
> Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well:
> 'Tis all perhaps which man acquires;
> But 'tis not what our youth desires".[1]

Still a great artist may succeed in making "calm" interesting. Equanimity has its place in literature; the poetry of equipoise is possible. Poems of society have, thus, two divisions: that which we mentioned first, the expression of the feelings which are called out by the accidents of society; next, the harmonised expression of that philosophy of indifference with which the world regards the fortunes of individuals and its own.

We have said that no modern nation can produce literature embodying this kind of cool reflection and delineation as it was once produced. By way of compensation, however, it may be, it no doubt is, easier now to produce the lyrical kinds of poems of society—the light expression of its light emotions—

[1] Matthew Arnold: "Youth and Calm".

than it was in ancient times. Society itself is better. There is something hard in paganism, which is aways felt even in the softest traits of the most delicate society in antiquity. The social influence of women in modern times gives an interest, a little pervading excitement, to social events. Civilisation, besides, has made comfort possible; it has, at least in part, created a scene in which society can be conducted. Its petty conveniences may or may not be great benefits according to a recondite philosophy; but there can be no doubt that for actual men and women in actual conversation it is of the greatest importance that their feet should not be cold; that their eyes and mouths should not be troubled with smoke; that sofas should be good, and attractive chairs many. Modern times have the advantage of the ancient in the scenery of flirtation. The little boy complained that you could not find "drawing-room" in the dictionary. Perhaps even because our reflections are deeper, our inner life less purely pagan, our apparent life is softer and easier. Some have said, that one reason why physical science made so little progress in ancient times was, that people were in doubt about more interesting things; men must have, it has been alleged, a settled creed as to human life and human hopes, before they will attend to shells and snails and pressure. And whether this be so or not, perhaps a pleasant society is only possible to persons at ease as to what is beyond society. Those only can lie on the grass who fear no volcano underneath, and can bear to look at the blue vault above.

Among modern nations it is not difficult to say where we should look for success in the art of social poetry. "Wherever," said Mr. Lewes the other day, "the French go, they take what they call their civilisation—that is, a *café* and a theatre." And though this be a trifle severe, yet in its essence its meaning is correct. The French have in some manner or other put their mark on all the externals of European life. The essence of every country remains little affected by their teaching; but in all the superficial embellishments of society they have enjoined the fashion; and the very language in which those embellishments are spoken of, shows at once whence

they were derived. Something of this is doubtless due to the accidents of a central position, and an early and prolonged political influence; but more to a certain neatness of nature, a certain finish of the senses, which enables them more easily than others to touch lightly the light things of society, to see the *comme-il-faut*. "I like," said a good judge, "to hear a Frenchman talk; he strikes a light." On a hundred topics he gives the bright sharp edge, where others have only a blunt approximation.

Nor is this anticipation disappointed. Reviewers do not advance such theories unless they correspond with known results. For many years the French have not been more celebrated for memoirs which professedly describe a real society than they have been for the light social song which embodies its sentiments and pours forth its spirit. The principle on which such writings are composed is the taking some incident—not voluntarily (for the incident doubtless of itself takes a hold on the poet's mind)—and out of that incident developing all which there is in it. A grave form is of course inconsistent with such art. The spirit of such things is half-mirthful; a very profound meaning is rarely to be expected; but little incidents are not destitute of meaning, and a delicate touch will delineate it in words. A profound excitement likewise such poems cannot produce; they do not address the passions or the intuitions, the heart or the soul, but a gentle pleasure, half sympathy, half amusement, is that at which they aim. They do not please us equally in all moods of mind: sometimes they seem nothing and nonsense, like society itself. We must not be too active or too inactive, to like them; the tension of mind must not be too great; in our highest moods the littlenesses of life are petty; the mind must not be obtusely passive; light touches will not stimulate a sluggish inaction. This dependence on the mood of mind of the reader makes it dangerous to elucidate this sort of art by quotation; Béranger has, however, the following:—

"*Laideur et Beauté.*

"Sa trop grande beauté m'obsède;
C'est un masque aisément trompeur.
Oui, je voudrais qu'elle fût laide,
Mais laide, laide à faire peur.

Belle ainsi faut-il que je l'aime !
Dieu, reprends ce don éclatant ;
Je le demande à l'enfer même :
Qu'elle soit laide et que je l'aime autant.

" A ces mots m'apparaît le diable ;
C'est le père de la laideur.
' Rendons-la,' dit-il, ' effroyable,
De tes rivaux trompons l'ardeur.
J'aime assez ces métamorphoses.
Ta belle ici vient en chantant ;
Perles, tombez ; fanez-vous roses :
La voilà laide, et tu l'aimes autant.'

" —Laide ! moi ? dit-elle étonnée.
Elle s'approche d'un miroir,
Doute d'abord, puis, consternée,
Tombe en un morne désespoir.
' Pour moi seul tu jurais de vivre,'
Lui dis-je, à ses pieds me jetant ;
' A mon seul amour il te livre.
Plus laide encore, je t'aimerais autant.'

" Ses yeux éteints fondent en larmes,
Alors sa douleur m'attendrit.
' Ah ! rendez, rendez-lui ses charmes.'
'—Soit ! ' répond Satan, qui sourit.
Ainsi que naît la fraîche aurore,
Sa beauté renaît à l'instant.
Elle est, je crois, plus belle encore :
Elle est plus belle, et moi je l'aime autant.

Vite au miroir elle s'assure
Qu'on lui rend bien tous ses appas ;
Des pleurs restent sur sa figure,
Qu'elle essuie en grondant tout bas.
Satan s'envole, et la cruelle
Fuit et s'écrie en me quittant :
'Jamais fille que Dieu fit belle
Ne doit aimer qui peut l'aimer autant '. "

And this is even a more characteristic specimen :—

" *La Mouche.*

" Au bruit de notre gaîté folle,
Au bruit des verres, des chansons,
Quelle mouche murmure et vole,
Et revient quand nous la chassons ? (*bis.*)

C'est quelque dieu, je le soupçonne,
Qu'un peu de bonheur rend jaloux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous. } (*bis.*)

" Transformée en mouche hideuse,
Amis, oui, c'est, j'en suis certain,
La Raison, déité grondeuse,
Qu'irrite un si joyeux festin.
L'orage approche, le ciel tonne,
Voilà ce que dit son courroux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

" C'est la Raison qui vient me dire :
' A ton âge on vit en reclus.
Ne bois plus tant, cesse de rire,
Cesse d'aimer, ne chante plus.'
Ainsi son beffroi toujours sonne
Aux lueurs des feux les plus doux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

" C'est la Raison, gare à Lisette !
Son dard la menace toujours.
Dieux ! il perce la collerette :
Le sang coule ! accourez, Amours !
Amours ! poursuivez la félonne ;
Qu'elle expire enfin sous vos coups.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

" Victoire ! amis, elle se noie
Dans l'aï que Lise a versé.
Victoire ! et qu'aux mains de la Joie
Le sceptre enfin soit replacé. (*bis.*)
Un souffle ébranle sa couronne ;
Une mouche nous troublait tous.
Ne craignons plus qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous." } (*bis.*)

To make poetry out of a fly is a difficult operation. It used to be said of the Lake school of criticism, in Mr. Wordsworth's early and more rigid days, that there was no such term as " elegant " in its nomenclature. The reason is that, dealing, or attempting to deal, only with the essential aboriginal principles of human nature, that school had no

room and no occasion for those minor contrivances of thought and language which are necessary to express the complex accumulation of little feelings, the secondary growth of human emotion. The underwood of nature is "elegant"; the bare ascending forest-tree despises what is so trivial,—it is grave and solemn. To such verses, on the other hand, as have been quoted, "elegance" is essential; the delicate finish of fleeting forms is the only excellence they can have.

The characteristic deficiencies of French literature have no room to show themselves in this class of art. "Though France herself denies," says a recent writer, "yet all other nations with one voice proclaim her inferiority to her rivals in poetry and romance, and in all the other elevated fields of fiction. A French Dante, or Michael Angelo, or Cervantes, or Murillo, or Goethe, or Shakespeare, or Milton, we at once perceive to be a mere anomaly; a supposition which may, indeed, be proposed in terms, but which in reality is inconceivable and impossible." In metaphysics, the reason seems to be that the French character is incapable of being mastered by an unseen idea, without being so tyrannised over by it as to be incapable of artistic development. Such a character as Robespierre's may explain what we mean. His entire nature was taken up and absorbed in certain ideas; he had almost a vanity in them; he was of them, and they were of him. But they appear in his mind, in his speeches, in his life, in their driest and barest form; they have no motion, life, or roundness. We are obliged to use many metaphors remotely and with difficulty to indicate the procedure of the imagination. In one of these metaphors we figure an idea of imagination as a living thing, a kind of growing plant, with a peculiar form, and ever preserving its identity, but absorbing from the earth and air all kindred, suitable, and, so to say, annexable materials. In a mind such as Robespierre's, in the type of the fanatic mind, there is no such thing. The ideas seem a kind of dry hard capsules, never growing, never enlarging, never uniting. Development is denied them; they cannot expand, or ripen, or mellow. Dogma is a dry hard husk; poetry has the soft down of the real fruit. Ideas seize on the

fanatic mind just as they do on the poetical; they have the same imperious ruling power. The difference is, that in the one the impelling force is immutable, iron, tyrannical; in the other the rule is expansive, growing, free, taking up from all around it moment by moment whatever is fit, as in the political world a great constitution arises through centuries, with a shape that does not vary, but with movement for its essence and the fluctuation of elements for its vitality. A thin poor mind like Robespierre's seems pressed and hampered by the bony fingers of a skeleton hand; a poet's is expanded and warmed at the same time that it is impelled by a pure life-blood of imagination. The French, as we have said, are hardly capable of this. When great remote ideas seize upon them at all, they become fanatics. The wild, chimerical, revolutionary, mad Frenchman has the stiffest of human minds. He is under the law of his creed; he has not attained to the higher freedom of the impelling imagination. The prosing rhetoric of the French tragedy shows the same defect in another form. The ideas which should have become living realities, remain as lean abstractions. The characters are speaking officials, jets of attenuated oratory. But exactly on this very account the French mind has a genius for the poetry of society. Unable to remove itself into the higher region of imagined forms, it has the quickest detective insight into the exact relation of surrounding superficial phenomena. There are two ways of putting it: either being fascinated by the present, they cannot rise to what is not present; or being by defect of nature unable to rise to what is not present, they are concentrated and absorbed in that which is so. Of course there ought not to be, but there *is*, a world of *bonbons*, of *salons*, of *esprit*. Living in the present, they have the poetry of the present. The English genius is just the opposite. Our cumbrous intellect has no call to light artificialities. We do not excel in punctuated detail or nicely-squared elaboration. It puts us out of patience that others should. A respectable Englishman murmured in the *Café de Paris*, "I wish I had a hunch of mutton". He could not bear the secondary niceties with which he was surrounded. Our art has the same

principle. We excel in strong, noble imagination, in solid stuff. Shakespeare is tough work; he has the play of the rising energy, the buoyant freedom of the unbounded mind; but no writer is so destitute of the simplifying dexterities of the manipulating intellect.

It is dangerous for a foreigner to give an opinion on *minutiæ* of style, especially on points affecting the characteristic excellences of national style. The French language is always neat; all French styles somehow seem good. But Béranger appears to have a peculiar neatness. He tells us that all his songs are the production of a painful effort. If so, the reader should be most grateful; *he* suffers no pain. The delicate elaboration of the writer has given a singular currency to the words. Difficult writing is rarely easy reading. It can never be so when the labour is spent in piecing together elements not joined by an insensible touch of imagination. The highest praise is due to a writer whose ideas are more delicately connected by unconscious genius than other men's are, and yet who spends labour and toil in giving the production a yet cunninger finish, a still smoother connection. The characteristic aloofness of the Gothic mind, its tendency to devote itself to what is not present, is represented in composition by a want of care in the pettinesses of style. A certain clumsiness pervades all tongues of German origin. Instead of the language having been sharpened and improved by the constant keenness of attentive minds, it has been habitually used obtusely and crudely. Light, loquacious Gaul has for ages been the contrast. If you take up a pen just used by a good writer, for a moment you seem to write rather well. A language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasure of dexterous felicities. It is not, according to the fine expression of Mr. Emerson, "fossil poetry";[1] it is crystallised *esprit*.

A French critic has praised Béranger for having retained the *refrain*, or burden, "*la rime de l'air*," as he calls it. Perhaps music is more necessary as an accompaniment to the poetry of society than it is to any other poetry. Without

[1] Essay on "The Poet".

a sensuous reminder, we might forget that it was poetry; especially in a sparkling, glittering, attenuated language, we might be absorbed as in the defined elegances of prose. In half-trivial compositions we easily forget the little central fancy. The music prevents this: it gives oneness to the parts, pieces together the shavings of the intellect, makes audible the flow of imagination.

The poetry of society tends to the poetry of love. All poetry tends that way. By some very subtle links, which no metaphysician has skilfully tracked, the imagination, even in effects and employments which seem remote, is singularly so connected. One smiles to see the feeling recur. Half the poets can scarcely keep away from it: in the high and dry epic you may see the poet return to it. And perhaps this is not unaccountable. The more delicate and stealing the sensuous element, the more the mind is disposed to brood upon it; the more we dwell on it in stillness, the more it influences the wandering, hovering faculty which we term imagination. The first constructive effort of imagination is beyond the limit of consciousness; the faculty works unseen. But we know that it works in a certain soft leisure only: and this in ordinary minds is almost confined to, in the highest is most commonly accompanied by, the subtlest emotion of reverie. So insinuating is that feeling, that no poet is alive to all its influences; so potent is it, that the words of a great poet, in our complex modern time, are rarely ever free from its traces. The phrase "stealing calm," which most naturally and graphically describes the state of soul in which the imagination works, quite equally expresses, it is said, the coming in and continuance of the not uncommon emotion. Passing, however, from such metaphysics, there is no difficulty in believing that the poetry of society will tend to the most romantic part of society,—away from aunts and uncles, antiquaries and wigs, to younger and pleasanter elements. The talk of society does so; probably its literature will do so likewise. There are, nevertheless, some limiting considerations, which make this tendency less all-powerful than we might expect it to be. In the first place, the poetry of society cannot deal with passion.

Its light touch is not competent to express eager, intense emotion. Rather, we should say, the essential nature of the poetry of amusement is inconsistent with those rugged, firm, aboriginal elements which passion brings to the surface. The volcano is inconsistent with careless talk; you cannot comfortably associate with lava. Such songs as those of Burns are the very antithesis to the levity of society. A certain explicitness pervades them:—

> "Come, let me take thee to my breast,
> And pledge we ne'er shall sunder;
> And I shall spurn as vilest dust
> The warld's wealth and grandeur".

There is a story of his having addressed a lady in society, some time after he came to Edinburgh, in this direct style, and being offended that she took notice of it. The verses were in English, and were not intended to mean anything particular, only to be an elegant attention; but you might as well ask a young lady to take brandy with you as compliment her in this intense manner. The eager peasant-poet was at fault in the polished refinements of the half-feeling drawing-room. Again, the poetry of society can scarcely deal with affection. No poetry, except in hints, and for moments, perhaps ever can. You might as well tell secrets to the town-crier. The essence of poetry somehow is publicity. It is very odd when one reads many of the sentiments which are expressed there,—the brooding thought, the delicate feeling, the high conception. What is the use of telling these to the mass of men? Will the grocer feel them?—will the greasy butcher in the blue coat feel them? Are there not some emphatic remarks by Lord Byron on Mr. Sanders ("the d—d saltfish seller" of Venice),[1] who could not appreciate *Don Juan?* Nevertheless, for some subtle reason or other, poets do crave, almost more than other men, the public approbation. To have a work of art in your imagination, and that no one else should know of it, is a great pain. But even this craving has its limits. Art can only deal with the universal. Characters, sentiments, actions, must be described

[1] Moore's *Byron.*

in what in the old language might be called their conceptual shape. There must always be an idea in them. If we compare a great character in fiction, say that of Hamlet, with a well-known character in life, we are struck almost at once by the typical and representative nature of the former. We seem to have a more *summary* conception of it, if the phrase may be allowed, than we have of the people we know best in reality. Indeed, our notion of the fictitious character rather resembles a notion of actual persons of whom we know a little, and but a little,—of a public man, suppose, of whom from his speeches and writings we know something, but with whom we never exchanged a word. We generalise a few traits; we do what the historian will have to do hereafter; we *make* a man, so to speak, resembling the real one, but more defined, more simple and comprehensible. The objects on which affection turns are exactly the opposite. In their essence they are individual, peculiar. Perhaps they become known under a kind of confidence; but even if not, Nature has hallowed the details of near life by an inevitable secrecy. You cannot expect other persons to feel them; you cannot tell your own intellect what they are. An individuality lurks in our nature. Each soul (as the divines speak) clings to each soul. Poetry is impossible on such points as these: they seem too sacred, too essential. The most that it can do is, by hints and little marks in the interstices of a universalised delineation, to suggest that there is something more than what is stated, and more inward and potent than what is stated. Affection as a settled subject is incompatible with art. And thus the poetry of society is limited on its romantic side in two ways: first, by the infinite, intense nature of passion, which forces the voice of art beyond the social tone; and by the confidential, incomprehensible nature of affection, which will not bear to be developed for the public by the fancy in any way.

Being so bounded within the ordinary sphere of their art, poets of this world have contrived or found a substitute. In every country there is a society which is no society. The French, which is the most worldly of literatures, has devoted itself to the delineation of this outside world. There is no

form, comic or serious, dramatic or lyrical, in which the subject has not been treated: the burden is—

"Lisette, ma Lisette,
Tu m'as trompé toujours;
Mais vive la grisette!
Je veux, Lisette,
Boire à nos amours."

There is obviously no need of affection in *this* society. The whole plot of the notorious novel, *La Dame aux Camélias*,—and a very remarkable one it is,—is founded on the incongruity of real feeling with this world, and the singular and inappropriate consequences which result, if, by any rare chance, it does appear there. Passion is almost *a fortiori* out of the question. The depths of human nature have nothing to do with this life. On this account, perhaps, it is that it harmonises so little with the English literature and character. An Englishman can scarcely live on the surface; his passions are too strong, his power of *finesse* too little. Accordingly, since Defoe, who treated the subject with a coarse matter-of-factness, there has been nothing in our literature of this kind—nothing at least professedly devoted to it. How far this is due to real excellence, how far to the *bourgeois* and not very outspoken temper of our recent writers, we need not in this place discuss. There is no occasion to quote in this country the early poetry of Béranger, at least not the sentimental part of it. We may take, in preference, one of his poems written in old, or rather in middle age:—

"*Cinquante Ans.*

"Pourquoi ces fleurs? est-ce ma fête?
Non; ce bouquet vient m'annoncer
Qu'un demi-siècle sur ma tête
Achève aujourd'hui de passer.
Oh! combien nos jours sont rapides!
Oh! combien j'ai perdu d'instants!
Oh! combien je me sens de rides!
Hélas! hélas! j'ai cinquante ans.

"A cet âge, tout nous échappe;
Le fruit meurt sur l'arbre jauni.
Mais à ma porte quelqu'un frappe;
N'ouvrons point: mon rôle est fini.

C'est, je gage, un docteur qui jette
Sa carte, où s'est logé le Temps.
Jadis, j'aurais dit : C'est Lisette.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans.

" En maux cuisants vieillesse abonde :
C'est la goutte qui nous meurtrit ;
La cécité, prison profonde ;
La surdité, dont chacun rit.
Puis la raison, lampe qui baisse,
N'a plus que des feux tremblotants.
Enfants, honorez la vieillesse !
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans !

" Ciel ! j'entends la Mort, qui, joyeuse,
Arrive en se frottant les mains.
A ma porte la fossoyeuse
Frappe ; adieu, messieurs les humains !
En bas, guerre, famine et peste ;
En haut, plus d'astres éclatants.
Ouvrons, tandis que Dieu me reste.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans.

" Mais non ; c'est vous ! vous, jeune amie,
Sœur de charité des amours !
Vous tirez mon âme endormie
Du cauchemar des mauvais jours.
Semant les roses de votre âge
Partout, comme fait le printemps,
Parfumez les rêves d'un sage.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans."

This is the last scene of the *grisette*, of whom we read in so many songs sparkling with youth and gaiety.

A certain intellectuality, however, pervades Béranger's love-songs. You seem to feel, to see, not merely the emotion, but the mind, in the background viewing that emotion. You are conscious of a considerateness qualifying and contrasting with the effervescing champagne of the feelings described. Desire is rarefied; sense half becomes an idea. You may trace a similar metamorphosis in the poetry of passion itself. If we contrast such a poem as Shelley's " Epipsychidion " with the natural language of common passion, we see how curiously the intellect can take its share in the dizziness of sense. In the same way, in the lightest poems of Béranger we feel that

it may be infused, may interpenetrate the most buoyant effervescence.

Nothing is more odd than to contrast the luxurious and voluptuous nature of much of Béranger's poetry with the circumstances of his life. He never in all his productive time had more than £80 a year; the smallest party of pleasure made him live, he tells us himself, most ascetically for a week; so far from leading the life of a Sybarite, his youth was one of anxiety and privation. A more worldly poet has probably never written, but no poet has shown in life so philosophic an estimate of this world's goods. His origin is very unaristocratic. He was born in August, 1780, at the house of his grandfather, a poor old tailor. Of his mother we hear nothing. His father was a speculative, sanguine man, who never succeeded. His principal education was given him by an aunt, who taught him to read and to write, and perhaps generally incited his mind. His school-teaching tells of the philosophy of the revolutionary time. By way of primary school for the town of Péronne, a patriotic member of the National Assembly had founded an *institut d'enfants*. "It offered," we are told, "at once the image of a club and that of a camp; the boys wore a military uniform; at every public event they named deputations, delivered orations, voted addresses: letters were written to the citizen Robespierre and the citizen Tallien." Naturally, amid such great affairs there was no time for mere grammar; they did not teach *Latin*. Nor did Béranger ever acquire any knowledge of that language; and he may be said to be destitute of what is in the usual sense called culture. Accordingly, it has in these days been made a matter of wonder by critics, whom we may think pedantic, that one so destitute should be able to produce such works. But a far keener judge has pronounced the contrary. Goethe, who certainly did not undervalue the most elaborate and artful cultivation, at once pronounced Béranger to have "a nature most happily endowed, firmly grounded in himself, purely developed from himself, and quite in harmony with himself".[1] In fact, as these words mean, Béranger, by happiness of nature or self-attention, has

[1] Conversations with Eckermann and Soret, 4th May, 1830.

that *centrality* of mind, which is the really valuable result of colleges and teaching. He puts things together; he refers things to a principle; rather, they group themselves in his intelligence insensibly round a principle. There is nothing *distrait* in his genius; the man has attained to be himself; a cool oneness, a poised personality pervades him. "The unlearned," it has been said, "judge at random." Béranger is not unlearned in this sense. There is no one who judges more simply, smoothly, and uniformly. His ideas refer to an exact measure. He has mastered what comes before him. And though doubtless unacquainted with foreign and incongruous literatures, he has mastered his own literature, which was shaped by kindred persons, and has been the expression of analogous natures; and this has helped him in expressing himself.

In the same way, his poor youth and boyhood have given a reality to his productions. He seems to have had this in mind in praising the "practical education which I have received". He was bred a printer; and the highest post he attained was a clerkship at the university, worth, as has been said, £80 per annum. Accordingly he has everywhere a sympathy with the common people, an unsought familiarity with them and their life. Sybarite poetry commonly wants this. The aristocratic nature is superficial; it relates to a life protected from simple wants, depending on luxurious artifices. "Mamma," said the simple-minded young nobleman, "when poor people have no bread, why do not they eat buns? they are much better." An over-perfumed softness pervades the poetry of society. You see this in the songs of Moore, the best of the sort we have; all is beautiful, soft, half-sincere. There is a little falsetto in the tone, everything reminds you of the drawing-room and the *pianoforte;* and not only so—for all poetry of society must in a measure do this—but it seems fit for no other scene. Naturalness is the last word of praise that would be suitable. In the scented air we forget that there is a *pavé* and a multitude. Perhaps France is of all countries which have ever existed the one in which we might seek an exception from this luxurious limitation. A certain *égalité* may pervade its art as

its society. There is no such difference as with us between the shoeblack and the gentleman. A certain refinement is very common ; an extreme refinement possibly rare. Béranger was able to write his poems in poverty ; they are popular with the poor.

A success even greater than what we have described as having been achieved by Béranger in the first class of the poems of society—that of amusement—has been attained by him in the second class, expressive of epicurean speculation. Perhaps it is one of his characteristics that the two are for ever running one into another. There is animation in his thinking ; there is meaning in his gaiety. It requires no elaborate explanation to make evident the connection between scepticism and luxuriousness. Every one thinks of the Sadducee as in cool halls and soft robes ; no one supposes that the Sybarite believes. Pain not only purifies the mind, but deepens the nature. A simple, happy life is animal ; it is pleasant, and it perishes. All writers who have devoted themselves to the explanation of this world's view of itself are necessarily in a certain measure Sadducees. The world is Sadducee itself ; it cannot be anything else without recognising a higher creed, a more binding law, a more solemn reality—without ceasing to be the world. Equanimity is incredulous ; impartiality does not care ; an indifferent politeness is sceptical. Though not a single speculative opinion is expressed, we may feel this in " Roger Bontemps " :—

" *Roger Bontemps.*

" Aux gens atrabilaires
Pour exemple donné,
En un temps de misères
Roger Bontemps est né.
Vivre obscur à sa guise,
Narguer les mécontents :
Eh gai ! c'est la devise
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Du chapeau de son père
Coiffé dans les grands jours,
De roses ou de lierre
Le rajeunir toujours ;

Mettre un manteau de bure,
Vieil ami de vingt ans :
Eh gai ! c'est la parure
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Posséder dans sa hutte
Une table, un vieux lit,
Des cartes, une flûte,
Un broc que Dieu remplit,
Un portrait de maîtresse,
Un coffre et rien dedans :
Eh gai ! c'est la richesse
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Aux enfants de la ville
Montrer de petits jeux ;
Etre un faiseur habile
De contes graveleux ;
Ne parler que de danse
Et d'almanachs chantants :
Eh gai ! c'est la science
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Faute de vin d'élite,
Sabler ceux du canton ;
Préférer Marguerite
Aux dames du grand ton ;
De joie et de tendresse
Remplir tous ses instants :
Eh gai ! c'est la sagesse
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Dire au Ciel : Je me fie,
Mon père, à ta bonté ;
De ma philosophie
Pardonne la gaîté ;
Que ma saison dernière
Soit encore un printemps :
Eh gai ! c'est la prière
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Vous, pauvres pleins d'envie,
Vous, riches désireux,
Vous, dont le char dévie
Après un cours heureux ;
Vous, qui perdrez peut-être
Des titres éclatants,
Eh gai ! prenez pour maître
Le gros Roger Bontemps."

At the same time, in Béranger the scepticism is not extreme. The skeleton is not paraded. That the world is a passing show, a painted scene, is admitted; you seem to know that it is all acting and rouge and illusion: still the pleasantness of the acting is dwelt on, the rouge is never rubbed off, the dream runs lightly and easily. No nightmare haunts you, you have no uneasy sense that you are about to awaken. Persons who require a sense of reality may complain; pain is perhaps necessary to sharpen their nerves, a tough effort to harden their consciousness: but if you pass by this objection of the threshold, if you admit the possibility of a superficial and fleeting world, you will not find a better one than Béranger's world. Suppose all the world were a *restaurant*, his is a good *restaurant;* admit that life is an effervescing champagne, his is the best for the moment.

In several respects Béranger contrasts with Horace, the poet whom in general he most resembles. The song of "Roger Bontemps" suggests one of the most obvious differences. It is essentially democratic. As we have said before, Béranger is the poet of the people; he himself says, *Le peuple c'est ma muse.* Throughout Horace's writings, however much he may speak, and speak justly, of the simplicity of his tastes, you are always conscious that his position is exceptional. Everybody cannot be the friend of Mæcenas; every cheerful man of the world cannot see the springs of the great world. The intellect of most self-indulgent men must satisfy itself with small indulgences. Without a hard ascent you can rarely see a great view. Horace had the almost unequalled felicity of watching the characters and thoughts and tendencies of the governors of the world, the nicest manipulation of the most ingenious statesmen, the inner tastes and predilections which are the origin of the most important transactions; and yet had the ease and pleasantness of the common and effortless life. So rare a fortune cannot be a general model; the gospel of Epicureanism must not ask a close imitation of one who had such very special advantages. Béranger gives the acceptors of that creed a commoner type. Out of nothing but the most ordinary advantages—the garret, the almost empty purse, the not over-attired *grisette*—

he has given them a model of the sparkling and quick existence for which their fancy is longing. You cannot imagine commoner materials. In another respect Horace and Béranger are remarkably contrasted. Béranger, sceptical and indifferent as he is, has a faith in, and zeal for, liberty. It seems odd that he should care for that sort of thing; but he does care for it. Horace probably had a little personal shame attaching to such ideas. No regimental officer of our own time can have "joined" in a state of more crass ignorance, than did the stout little student from Athens in all probability join the army of Brutus; the legionaries must have taken the measure of him, as the sergeants of our living friends. Anyhow he was not partial to such reflections; zeal for political institutions is quite as foreign to him as any other zeal. A certain hope in the future is characteristic of Béranger—

> "Qui découvrit un nouveau monde?
> Un fou qu'on raillait en tout lieu."

Modern faith colours even bystanding scepticism. Though probably with no very accurate ideas of the nature of liberty, Béranger believes that it is a great good, and that France will have it.

The point in which Béranger most resembles Horace is that which is the most essential in the characters of them both —their geniality. This is the very essence of the poems of society; it springs in the verses of amusement, it harmonises with acquiescing sympathy the poems of indifference. And yet few qualities in writing are so rare. A certain malevolence enters into literary ink; the point of the pen pricks. Pope is the very best example of this. With every desire to imitate Horace, he cannot touch any of his subjects, or any kindred subjects, without infusing a bitter ingredient. It is not given to the children of men to be philosophers without envy. Lookers-on can hardly bear the spectacle of the great world. If you watch the carriages rolling down to the House of Lords, you will try to depreciate the House of Lords. Idleness is cynical. Both Béranger and Horace are exceptions to this. Both enjoy the roll of the wheels; both love the glitter of the carriages; neither is angry at the sun. Each knows that he is

as happy as he can be—that he is all that he can be in his contemplative philosophy. In his means of expression for the purpose in hand, the Frenchman has the advantage. The Latin language is clumsy. Light pleasure was an exotic in the Roman world; the terms in which you strive to describe it suit rather the shrill camp and droning law-court. In English, as we hinted just now, we have this too. Business is in our words; a too heavy sense clogs our literature; even in a writer so apt as Pope at the *finesse* of words, you feel that the solid Gothic roots impede him. It is difficult not to be cumbrous. The horse may be fleet and light, but the wheels are ponderous and the road goes heavily. Béranger certainly has not this difficulty; nobody ever denied that a Frenchman could be light, that the French language was adapted for levity.

When we ascribed an absence of bitterness and malevolence to Béranger, we were far from meaning that he is not a satirist. Every light writer in a measure must be so. Mirth is the imagery of society; and mirth must make fun of somebody. The nineteenth century has not had many shrewder critics than its easy-natured poet. Its intense dulness particularly strikes him. He dreads the dreariness of the Academy; pomposity bores him; formalism tires him; he thinks, and may well think, it dreary to have

> "Pour grands hommes des journalistes,
> Pour amusement l'Opéra".

But skilful as is the mirth, its spirit is genial and good-natured. "You have been laughing at me constantly, Sydney, for the last seven years," said a friend to the late Canon of St. Paul's, "and yet in all that time you never said a single thing to me that I wished unsaid."[1] So far as its essential features are concerned, the nineteenth century may say the same of its musical satirist. Perhaps, however, the Bourbons might a little object. Clever people have always a *little* malice against the stupid.

There is no more striking example of the degree in which the gospel of good works has penetrated our modern society, than that Béranger has talked of "utilising his talent". The

[1] Dudley: *Lady Holland's Memoirs of Sydney Smith*, chap. xi.

epicurean poet considers that he has been a political missionary. Well may others be condemned to the penal servitude of industry, if the lightest and idlest of skilful men boasts of being subjected to it. If Béranger thinks it necessary to think that he has been useful, others may well think so too; let us accept the heavy doctrine of hard labour; there is no other way to heave off the rubbish of this world. The mode in which Béranger is anxious to prove that he made his genius of use, is by diffusing a taste for liberty, and expressing an enthusiasm for it; and also, as we suppose, by quizzing those rulers of France who have not shared either the taste or the enthusiasm. Although, however, such may be the idea of the poet himself, posterity will scarcely confirm it. Political satire is the most ephemeral kind of literature. The circumstances to which it applies are local and temporary; the persons to whom it applies die. A very few months will make unintelligible what was at first strikingly plain. Béranger has illustrated this by an admission. There was a delay in publishing the last volume of his poems, many of which relate to the years or months immediately preceding the Revolution of 1830; the delay was not long, as the volume appeared in the first month of 1833, yet he says that many of the songs relate to the passing occurrences of a period "*déjà loin de nous*". On so shifting a scene as that of French political life, the jests of each act are forgotten with the act itself; the eager interest of each moment withdraws the mind from thinking of or dwelling on anything past. And in all countries administration is ephemeral; what relates to it is transitory. Satires on its detail are like the jests of a public office; the clerks change, oblivion covers their peculiarities; the point of the joke is forgotten. There are some considerable exceptions to the saying that foreign literary opinion is a "contemporary posterity"; but in relation to satires on transitory transactions it is exactly expressive. No Englishman will now care for many of Béranger's songs which were once in the mouths of all his countrymen, which coloured the manners of revolutions, perhaps influenced their course. The fame of a poet may have a reference to politics; but it will be only to the wider species, to those social questions which never

die, the elements of that active human nature which is the same age after age. Béranger can hardly hope for this. Even the songs which relate to liberty can hardly hope for this immortality. They have the vagueness which has made French aspirations for freedom futile. So far as they express distinct feeling, their tendency is rather anti-aristocratic than in favour of simple real liberty. And an objection to mere rank, though a potent, is neither a very agreeable nor a very poetical sentiment. Moreover, when the love of liberty is to be imaginatively expressed, it requires to an Englishman's ear a sound bigger and more trumpet-tongued than the voice of Béranger.

On a deeper view, however, an attentive student will discover a great deal that is most instructive in the political career of the not very business-like poet. His life has been contemporaneous with the course of a great change; and throughout it the view which he has taken of the current events is that which sensible men took at the time, and which a sensible posterity (and these events will from their size attract attention enough to insure their being viewed sensibly) is likely to take. Béranger was present at the taking of the Bastille, but he was then only nine years old; the accuracy of opinion which we are claiming for him did not commence so early. His mature judgment begins with the career of Napoleon; and no one of the thousands who have written on that subject has viewed it perhaps more justly. He had no love for the despotism of the Empire, was alive to the harshness of its administration, did not care too much for its glory, must have felt more than once the social exhaustion. At the same time, no man was penetrated more profoundly, no literary man half so profoundly, with the popular admiration for the genius of the empire. His own verse has given the truest and most lasting expression of it:—

"*Les Souvenirs du Peuple.*

"On parlera de sa gloire
Sous le chaume bien longtemps.
L'humble toit, dans cinquante ans,
Ne connaîtra plus d'autre histoire.

Là viendront les villageois,
Dire alors à quelque vieille :
' Par des récits d'autrefois,
Mère, abrégez notre veille.
Bien, dit-on, qu'il nous ait nui,
Le peuple encor le révère,
Oui, le révère,
Parlez-nous de lui, grand'mère ;
Parlez-nous de lui.' (*bis.*)

" ' Mes enfants, dans ce village,
Suivi de rois, il passa.
Voilà bien longtemps de ça :
Je venais d'entrer en ménage.
A pied grimpant le coteau
Où pour voir je m'étais mise,
Il avait petit chapeau
Avec redingote grise.
Près de lui je me troublai ;
Il me dit : " Bonjour, ma chère,
Bonjour, ma chère ".'
—' Il vous a parlé, grand'mère !
Il vous a parlé ! '

" ' L'an d'après, moi, pauvre femme,
A Paris étant un jour,
Je le vis avec sa cour :
Il se rendait à Notre-Dame.
Tous les cœurs étaient contents ;
On admirait son cortége.
Chacun disait : " Quel beau temps !
Le ciel toujours le protége ".
Son sourire était bien doux,
D'un fils Dieu le rendait père,
Le rendait père.'
—' Quel beau jour pour vous, grand'mère
Quel beau jour pour vous ! '

" ' Mais, quand la pauvre Champagne
Fut en proie aux étrangers,
Lui, bravant tous les dangers,
Semblait seul tenir la campagne.
Un soir, tout comme aujourd'hui,
J'entends frapper à la porte.
J'ouvre. Bon Dieu ! c'était lui,
Suivi d'une faible escorte,

Il s'asseoit où me voilà,
S'écriant: "Oh! quelle guerre!
Oh! quelle guerre!"'
—'Il s'est assis là, grand'mère!
Il s'est assis là!'

"'J'ai faim,' dit-il; 'et bien vite
Je sers piquette et pain bis;
Puis il sèche ses habits,
Même à dormir le feu l'invite.
Au réveil, voyant mes pleurs,
Il me dit: "Bonne espérance!
Je cours, de tous ses malheurs,
Sous Paris, venger la France".
Il part; et, comme un trésor,
J'ai depuis gardé son verre,
Gardé son verre.'
'Vous l'avez encor, grand'mère!
Vous l'avez encor!'

"'Le voici. Mais à sa perte
Le héros fut entraîné.
Lui, qu'un pape a couronné,
Est mort dans une île déserte.
Longtemps aucun ne l'a cru;
On disait: "Il va paraître;
Par mer il est accouru;
L'étranger va voir son maître".
Quand d'erreur on nous tira,
Ma douleur fut bien amère!
Fut bien amère!'
—'Dieu vous bénira, grand'mère;
Dieu vous bénira.'"

This is a great exception to the transitoriness of political poetry. Such a character as that of Napoleon displayed on so large a stage, so great a genius amid such scenery of action, insures an immortality. "The page of universal history" which he was always coveting, he has attained; and it is a page which, from its singularity and its errors, its shame and its glory, will distract the attention from other pages. No one who has ever had in his mind the idea of Napoleon's character can forget it. Nothing too can be more natural than that the French should remember it. His

character possessed the primary imagination, the elementary conceiving power, in which they are deficient. So far from being restricted to the poetry of society, he would not have even appreciated it. A certain bareness marks his mind; his style is curt; the imaginative product is left rude; there is the distinct abstraction of the military diagram. The tact of light and passing talk, the detective imagination which is akin to that tact, and discovers the quick essence of social things,—he never had. In speaking of his power over popular fancies, Béranger has called him "the greatest poet of modern times". No genius can be more unlike his own, and therefore perhaps it is that he admires it so much. During the Hundred Days, Béranger says he was never under the delusion, then not rare, that the Emperor could become a constitutional monarch. The lion, he felt, would not change his skin. After the return of the Bourbons, he says, doubtless with truth, that his "*instinct du peuple*" told him they could never ally themselves with liberal principles, or unite with that new order of society which, though dating from the Revolution, had acquired in five and twenty years a half-prescriptive right. They and their followers came in to *take* possession, and it was impossible they could unite with what *was* in possession. During the whole reign of the hereditary Bourbon dynasty, Béranger was in opposition. Representing the natural sentiments of the new Frenchman, he could not bear the natural tendency of the ruling power to the half-forgotten practices of old France. The legitimate Bourbons were by their position the chieftains of the party advocating their right by birth; they could not be the kings of a people; and the poet of the people was against them. After the genius of Napoleon, all other governing minds would seem tame and contracted; and Charles X. was not a man to diminish the inevitable feeling. Béranger despised him. As the poet warred with the weapons of poetry, the Government retorted with the penalties of State. He was turned out of his petty clerkship, he was twice imprisoned; but these things only increased his popularity; and a firm and genial mind, so far from being moved, sang songs at

La Force itself. The Revolution of 1830 was willing to make his fortune.

"Je l'ai traitée," he says, "comme une puissance qui peut avoir des caprices auxquels il faut être en mesure de résister. Tous ou presque tous mes amis ont passé au ministère: j'en ai même encore un ou deux qui restent suspendus à ce mât de cocagne. Je me plais à croire qu'ils y sont accrochés par la basque, malgré les efforts qu'ils font pour descendre. J'aurais donc pu avoir part à la distribution des emplois. Malheureusement je n'ai pas l'amour des sinécures, et tout travail obligé m'est devenu insupportable, hors peut-être encore celui d'expéditionnaire. Des médisants ont prétendu que je faisais de la vertu. Fi donc! je faisais de la paresse. Ce défaut m'a tenu lieu de bien des qualités; aussi je le recommande à beaucoup de nos honnêtes gens. Il expose pourtant à de singuliers reproches. C'est à cette paresse si douce, que des censeurs rigides ont attribué l'éloignement où je me suis tenu de ceux de mes honorables amis qui ont eu le malheur d'arriver au pouvoir. Faisant trop d'honneur à ce qu'ils veulent bien appeler ma bonne tête, et oubliant trop combien il y a loin du simple bon sens à la science des grandes affaires, ces censeurs prétendent que mes conseils eussent éclairé plus d'un ministre. A les croire, tapi derrière le fauteuil de velours de nos hommes d'état, j'aurais conjuré les vents, dissipé les orages, et fait nager la France dans un océan de délices. Nous aurions tous de la liberté à revendre ou plutôt à donner, car nous n'en savons pas bien encore le prix. Eh! messieurs mes deux ou trois amis, qui prenez un chansonnier pour un magicien, on ne vous a donc pas dit que le pouvoir est une cloche qui empêche ceux qui la mettent en branle d'entendre aucun autre son? Sans doute des ministres consultent quelquefois ceux qu'ils ont sous la main: consulter est un moyen de parler de soi qu'on néglige rarement. Mais il ne suffirait pas de consulter de bonne foi des gens qui conseilleraient de même. Il faudrait encore exécuter: ceci est la part du caractère. Les intentions les plus pures, le patriotisme le plus éclairé ne le donnent pas toujours. Qui n'a vu de hauts personnages quitter un donneur d'avis avec une pensée courageuse, et, l'instant d'après, revenir vers lui, de je ne sais quel lieu de fascination, avec l'embarras d'un démenti donné aux résolutions les plus sages? 'Oh!' disent-ils, 'nous n'y serons plus repris! quelle galère!' Le plus honteux ajoute: 'Je voudrais bien vous voir à ma place!' Quand un ministre dit cela, soyez sûr qu'il n'a plus la tête à lui. Cependant il en est un, mais un seul, qui, sans avoir perdu la tête a répété souvent ce mot de la meilleure foi du monde; aussi ne l'addressait-il jamais à un ami."[1]

The statesman alluded to in the last paragraph is Manuel, his intimate friend, from whom he declares he could never have

[1] Preface to *Chansons*.

been separated, but whose death prevented his obtaining political honours. Nobody can read the above passage without feeling its tone of political sense. An enthusiasm for, yet half distrust of, the Revolution of July seems as sound a sentiment as could be looked for even in the most sensible contemporary. What he has thought of the present dynasty we do not know. He probably has as little concurred in the silly encomiums of its mere partisans as in the wild execrations of its disappointed enemies. His opinion could not have been either that of the English who *fêted* Louis Napoleon in 1855, or of those who despised him in 1851. The political fortunes of France during the last ten years must have been a painful scene of observation to one who remembered the taking of the Bastille. If there be such a thing as failure in the world, this looks like it.

Although we are very far from thinking that Béranger's claims on posterity are founded on his having utilised his talent in favour of liberty, it is very natural that he should think or half-think himself that it is so. His power over the multitude must have given him great pleasure; it is something to be able to write mottoes for a revolution; to write words for people to use, and hear people use those words. The same sort of pleasure which Horace derived from his nearness to the centre of great action, Béranger has derived from the power which his thorough sympathy with his countrymen has given him over them. A political satire may be ephemeral from the rapid oblivion of its circumstances; but it is not unnatural that the author, inevitably proud of its effect, may consider it of higher worth than mere verses of society.

This shrewd sense gives a solidity to the verses of Béranger which the social and amusing sort of poetry commonly wants; but nothing can redeem it from the reproach of wanting "*back* thought".[1] This is inevitable in such literature; as it professes to delineate for us the light essence of a fugitive world, it cannot be expected to dwell on those deep and eternal principles on which that world is based. It ignores them as light talk ignores them. The most opposite thing to the poetry of society is the

[1] Derwent Coleridge on Hartley.

poetry of inspiration. There exists, of course, a kind of imagination which detects the secrets of the universe—which fills us sometimes with dread, sometimes with hope—which awakens the soul, which makes pure the feelings, which explains Nature, reveals what is above Nature, chastens "the deep heart of man".[1] Our senses teach us what the world is; our intuitions where it is. We see the blue and gold of the world, its lively amusements, its gorgeous if superficial splendour, its currents of men; we feel its light spirits, we enjoy its happiness; we enjoy it, and we are puzzled. What is the object of all this? Why do we do all this? What is the universe *for?* Such a book as Béranger's suggests this difficulty in its strongest form. It embodies the essence of all that pleasure-loving, pleasure-giving, unaccountable world in which men spend their lives,—which they are compelled to live in, but which the moment you get out of it seems so odd that you can hardly believe it is real. On this account, as we were saying before, there is no book the impression of which varies so much in different moods of mind. Sometimes no reading is so pleasant; at others you half-despise and half-hate the idea of it; it seems to sum up and make clear the littleness of your own nature. Few can bear the theory of their amusements; it is essential to the pride of man to believe that he is industrious. We are irritated at literary laughter, and wroth at printed mirth. We turn angrily away to that higher poetry which gives the outline within which all these light colours are painted. From the capital of levity, and its self-amusing crowds; from the elastic *vaudeville* and the grinning actors; from *chansons* and *cafés* we turn away to the solemn in Nature, to the blue overarching sky: the one remains, the many pass; no number of seasons impairs the bloom of those hues, they are as soft to-morrow as to-day. The immeasurable depth folds us in. "Eternity," as the original thinker said, "is everlasting." We breathe a deep breath. And perhaps we have higher moments. We comprehend the "unintelligible world";[2] we see into "the life of things";[3] we fancy we know whence we come

[1] Shelley: "Alastor".
[2] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey". [3] *Ibid.*

and whither we go; words we have repeated for years have a meaning for the first time; texts of old Scripture seem to apply to *us*. . . . And—and—Mr. Thackeray would say, You come back into the town, and order dinner at a *restaurant*, and read Béranger once more.

And though this is true—though the author of "Le Dieu des Bonnes Gens" has certainly no claim to be called a profound divine—though we do not find in him any proper expression, scarcely any momentary recognition, of those intuitions which explain in a measure the scheme and idea of things, and form the back thought and inner structure of such minds as ours,—his sense and sympathy with the people enable him, perhaps compel him, to delineate those essential conditions which constitute the structure of exterior life, and determine with inevitable certainty the common life of common persons. He has no call to deal with heaven or the universe, but he knows the earth; he is restricted to the boundaries of time, but he understands time. He has extended his delineations beyond what in this country would be considered correct; "Les Cinq Êtages" can scarcely be quoted here; but a perhaps higher example of the same kind of art may be so:—

"*Le Vieux Vagabond.*

"Dans ce fossé cessons de vivre;
Je finis vieux, infirme et las;
Les passants vont dire: 'Il est ivre'.
Tant mieux! ils ne me plaindront pas.
J'en vois qui détournent la tête;
D'autres me jettent quelques sous.
Courez vite, allez à la fête:
Vieux vagabond, je puis mourir sans vous.

"Oui, je meurs ici de vieillesse,
Parce qu'on ne meurt pas de faim.
J'espérais voir de ma détresse
L'hôpital adoucir la fin;
Mais tout est plein dans chaque hospice,
Tant le peuple est infortuné.
La rue, hélas! fut ma nourrice:
Vieux vagabond, mourons où je suis né.

"Aux artisans, dans mon jeune âge,
J'ai dit : 'Qu'on m'enseigne un métier'.
'Va, nous n'avons pas trop d'ouvrage,'
Répondaient-ils, 'va mendier'.
Riches, qui me disiez : 'Travaille,'
J'eus bien des os de vos repas ;
J'ai bien dormi sur votre paille :
Vieux vagabond, je ne vous maudis pas.

"J'aurais pu voler, moi, pauvre homme ;
Mais non : mieux vaut tendre la main.
Au plus, j'ai dérobé la pomme
Qui mûrit au bord du chemin.
Vingt fois pourtant on me verrouille
Dans les cachots, de par le roi.
De mon seul bien on me dépouille :
Vieux vagabond, le soleil est à moi.

"Le pauvre a-t-il une patrie ?
Que me font vos vins et vos blés,
Votre gloire et votre industrie,
Et vos orateurs assemblés ?
Dans vos murs ouverts à ses armes
Lorsque l'étranger s'engraissait,
Comme un sot j'ai versé des larmes :
Vieux vagabond, sa main me nourrissait.

"Comme un insecte fait pour nuire,
Hommes, que ne m'écrasiez-vous !
Ah ! plutôt vous deviez m'instruire
A travailler au bien de tous.
Mis à l'abri du vent contraire,
Le ver fût devenu fourmi ;
Je vous aurais chéris en frère :
Vieux vagabond, je meurs votre ennemi."

Pathos in such a song as this enters into poetry. We sympathise with the essential lot of man. Poems of this kind are doubtless rare in Béranger. His commoner style is lighter and more cheerful; but no poet who has painted so well the light effervescence of light society can, when he likes, paint so well the solid, stubborn forms with which it is encompassed. The genial, firm sense of a large mind sees and comprehends all of human life which lies within the sphere of sense. He is an epicurean, as all merely sensible

men by inevitable consequence are; and as an epicurean, he prefers to deal with the superficial and gay forms of life; but he can deal with others when he chooses to be serious. Indeed, there is no melancholy like the melancholy of the epicurean. He is alive to the fixed conditions of earth, but not to that which is above earth. He muses on the temporary, as such; he admits the skeleton, but not the soul. It is wonderful that Béranger is so cheerful as he is.

We may conclude as we began. In all his works, in lyrics of levity, of politics, of worldly reflection,—Béranger, if he had not a single object, has attained a uniform result. He has given us an idea of the essential French character, such as we fancy it must be, but can never for ourselves hope to see that it is. We understand the nice tact, the quick intelligence, the gay precision; the essence of the drama we know—the spirit of what we have seen. We know his feeling:—

> "J'aime qu'un Russe soit Russe,
> Et qu'un Anglais soit Anglais;
> Si l'on est Prussien en Prusse,
> En France soyons Français".[1]

He has acted accordingly: he has delineated to us the essential Frenchman.

[1] "Le Bon Français."

THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.[1]

(1858.)

IT is not commonly on the generation which was contemporary with the production of great works of art that they exercise their most magical influence. Nor is it on the distant people whom we call posterity. Contemporaries bring to new books formed minds and stiffened creeds; posterity, if it regard them at all, looks at them as old subjects, worn-out topics, and hears a disputation on their merits with languid impartiality, like aged judges in a court of appeal. Even standard authors exercise but slender influence on the susceptible minds of a rising generation; they are become "papa's books"; the walls of the library are adorned with their regular volumes; but no hand touches them. Their fame is itself half an obstacle to their popularity; a delicate fancy shrinks from employing so great a celebrity as the companion of an idle hour. The generation which is really most influenced by a work of genius is commonly that which is still young when the first controversy respecting its merits arises; with the eagerness of youth they read and re-

[1] *Library Edition.* Illustrated by upwards of Two Hundred Engravings on Steel, after Drawings by Turner, Landseer, Wilkie, Stanfield, Roberts, etc., including Portraits of the Historical Personages described in the Novels. 25 vols. demy 8vo.

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read; their vanity is not unwilling to adjudicate: in the process their imagination is formed; the creations of the author range themselves in the memory; they become part of the substance of the very mind. The works of Sir Walter Scott can hardly be said to have gone through this exact process. Their immediate popularity was unbounded. No one—a few most captious critics apart—ever questioned their peculiar power. Still they are subject to a transition, which is in principle the same. At the time of their publication mature contemporaries read them with delight. Superficial the reading of grown men in some sort must be; it is only once in a lifetime that we can know the passionate reading of youth; men soon lose its eager learning power. But from peculiarities in their structure, which we shall try to indicate, the novels of Scott suffered less than almost any book of equal excellence from this inevitable superficiality of perusal. Their plain, and, so to say, cheerful merits suit the occupied man of genial middle life. Their appreciation was to an unusual degree coincident with their popularity. The next generation, hearing the praises of their fathers in their earliest reading time, seized with avidity on the volumes; and there is much in very many of them which is admirably fitted for the delight of boyhood. A third generation has now risen into at least the commencement of literary life, which is quite removed from the unbounded enthusiasm with which the Scotch novels were originally received, and does not always share the still more eager partiality of those who, in the opening of their minds, first received the tradition of their excellence. New books have arisen to compete with these; new interests distract us from them. The time, therefore, is not perhaps unfavourable for a slight criticism of these celebrated fictions; and their continual republication without any criticism for many years, seems almost to demand it.

There are two kinds of fiction which, though in common literature they may run very much into one another, are yet in reality distinguishable and separate. One of these, which we may call the *ubiquitous*, aims at describing the whole of human life in all its spheres, in all its aspects, with all its

varied interests, aims, and objects. It searches through the whole life of man; his practical pursuits, his speculative attempts, his romantic youth, and his domestic age. It gives an entire picture of all these; or if there be any lineaments which it forbears to depict, they are only such as the inevitable repression of a regulated society excludes from the admitted province of literary art. Of this kind are the novels of Cervantes and Le Sage, and, to a certain extent, of Smollett or Fielding. In our own time, Mr. Dickens is an author whom Nature intended to write to a certain extent with this aim. He should have given us *not* disjointed novels, with a vague attempt at a romantic plot, but sketches of diversified scenes, and the obvious life of varied mankind. The literary fates, however, if such beings there are, allotted otherwise. By a very terrible example of the way in which in this world great interests are postponed to little ones, the genius of authors is habitually sacrificed to the tastes of readers. In this age, the great readers of fiction are young people. The "addiction" of these is to romance; and accordingly a kind of novel has become so familiar to us as almost to engross the name, which deals solely with the passion of love; and if it uses other parts of human life for the occasions of its art, it does so only cursorily and occasionally, and with a view of throwing into a stronger or more delicate light those sentimental parts of earthly affairs which are the special objects of delineation. All prolonged delineation of other parts of human life is considered "dry," stupid, and distracts the mind of the youthful generation from the "fantasies" which peculiarly charm it. Mr. Olmstead has a story of some deputation of the Indians, at which the American orator harangued the barbarian audience about the "great spirit," and "the land of their fathers," in the style of Mr. Cooper's novels; during a moment's pause in the great stream, an old Indian asked the deputation: "Why does your chief speak thus to us? We did not wish great instruction or fine words; we desire brandy and tobacco." No critic in a time of competition will speak uncourteously of any reader of either sex; but it is indisputable that the old kind of novel, full of "great instruction" and

varied pictures, does not afford to some young gentlemen and some young ladies either the peculiar stimulus or the peculiar solace which they desire.

The Waverley Novels were published at a time when the causes that thus limit the sphere of fiction were coming into operation, but when they had not yet become so omnipotent as they are now. Accordingly, these novels everywhere bear marks of a state of transition. They are not devoted with anything like the present exclusiveness to the sentimental part of human life. They describe great events, singular characters, strange accidents, strange states of society; they dwell with a peculiar interest—and as if for their own sake—on antiquarian details relating to a past society. Singular customs, social practices, even political institutions which existed once in Scotland, and elsewhere, during the midde ages, are explained with a careful minuteness. At the same time the sentimental element assumes a great deal of prominence. The book is in fact, as well as in theory, a narrative of the feelings and fortunes of the hero and heroine. An attempt more or less successful has been made to insert an interesting love-story in each novel. Sir Walter was quite aware that the best delineation of the oddest characters, or the most quaint societies, or the strangest incidents, would not in general satisfy his readers. He has invariably attempted an account of youthful, sometimes of decidedly juvenile, feelings and actions. The difference between Sir Walter's novels and the specially romantic fictions of the present day is, that in the former the love-story is always, or nearly always, connected with some great event, or the fortunes of some great historical character, or the peculiar movements and incidents of some strange state of society; and that the author did not suppose or expect that his readers would be so absorbed in the sentimental aspect of human life as to be unable or unwilling to be interested in, or to attend to, any other. There is always a *locus in quo*, if the expression may be pardoned, in the Waverley Novels. The hero and heroine walk among the trees of the forest according to rule, but we are expected to take an interest in the forest as well as in them.

No novel, therefore, of Sir Walter Scott's can be considered to come exactly within the class which we have called the ubiquitous. None of them in any material degree attempts to deal with human affairs in all their spheres—to delineate as a whole the life of man. The canvas has a large background, in some cases too large either for artistic effect or the common reader's interest; but there are always real boundaries—Sir Walter had no *thesis* to maintain. Scarcely any writer will set himself to delineate the whole of human life, unless he has a doctrine concerning human life to put forth and inculcate. The effort is *doctrinaire*. Scott's imagination was strictly conservative. He could understand (with a few exceptions) any considerable movement of human life and action, and could always describe with easy freshness everything which he did understand; but he was not obliged by stress of fanaticism to maintain a dogma concerning them, or to show their peculiar relation to the general sphere of life. He described vigorously and boldly the peculiar scene and society which in every novel he had selected as the theatre of romantic action. Partly from their fidelity to nature, and partly from a consistency in the artist's mode of representation, these pictures group themselves from the several novels in the imagination, and an habitual reader comes to think of and understand what is meant by "Scott's world"; but the writer had no such distinct object before him. No one novel was designed to be a delineation of the world as Scott viewed it. We have vivid and fragmentary histories; it is for the slow critic of after-times to piece together their teaching.

From this intermediate position of the Waverley Novels, or at any rate in exact accordance with its requirements, is the special characteristic for which they are most remarkable. We may call this in a brief phrase their *romantic sense;* and perhaps we cannot better illustrate it than by a quotation from the novel to which the series owes its most usual name. It occurs in the description of the Court ball which Charles Edward is described as giving at Holyrood House the night before his march southward on his strange adventure. The striking interest of the scene before him, and the peculiar position of

his own sentimental career, are described as influencing the mind of the hero.

"Under the influence of these mixed sensations, and cheered at times by a smile of intelligence and approbation from the Prince as he passed the group, Waverley exerted his powers of fancy, animation, and eloquence, and attracted the general admiration of the company. The conversation gradually assumed the line best qualified for the display of his talents and acquisitions. The gaiety of the evening was exalted in character, rather than checked, by the approaching dangers of the morrow. All nerves were strung for the future, and prepared to enjoy the present. This mood is highly favourable for the exercise of the powers of imagination, for poetry, and for that eloquence which is allied to poetry."[1]

Neither "eloquence" nor "poetry" are the exact words with which it would be appropriate to describe the fresh style of the Waverley Novels; but the imagination of their author was stimulated by a fancied mixture of sentiment and fact, very much as he describes Waverley's to have been by a real experience of the two at once. The second volume of *Waverley* is one of the most striking illustrations of this peculiarity. The character of Charles Edward, his adventurous undertaking, his ancestral rights, the mixed selfishness and enthusiasm of the Highland chiefs, the fidelity of their hereditary followers, their striking and strange array, the contrast with the Baron of Bradwardine and the Lowland gentry; the collision of the motley and half-appointed host with the formed and finished English society, its passage by the Cumberland mountains and the blue lake of Ullswater—are unceasingly and without effort present to the mind of the writer, and incite with their historical interest the susceptibility of his imagination. But at the same time the mental struggle, or rather transition, in the mind of Waverley—for his mind was of the faint order which scarcely struggles—is never for an instant lost sight of. In the very midst of the inroad and the conflict, the acquiescent placidity with which the hero exchanges the service of the imperious for the appreciation of the "nice" heroine, is kept before us, and the imagination of Scott wandered without

[1] Chap. xliii.

effort from the great scene of martial affairs to the natural but rather unheroic sentiments of a young gentleman not very difficult to please. There is no trace of effort in the transition, as is so common in the inferior works of later copyists. Many historical novelists, especially those who with care and pains have "read up" their detail, are often evidently in a strait how to pass from their history to their sentiment. The fancy of Sir Walter could not help connecting the two. If he had given us the English side of the race to Derby, he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences, and also the loves of the cashier.

It is not unremarkable in connection with this, the special characteristic of the "Scotch novels," that their author began his literary life by collecting the old ballads of his native country. Ballad poetry is, in comparison at least with many other kinds of poetry, a sensible thing. It describes not only romantic events, but historical ones, incidents in which there is a form and body and consistence—events which have a result. Such a poem as "Chevy Chace," we need not explain, has its prosaic side. The latest historian of Greece[1] has nowhere been more successful than in his attempt to derive from Homer, the greatest of ballad poets, a thorough and consistent account of the political working of the Homeric state of society. The early natural imagination of men seizes firmly on all which interests the minds and hearts of natural men. We find in its delineations the council as well as the marriage; the harsh conflict as well as the deep love-affair. Scott's own poetry is essentially a modernised edition of the traditional poems which his early youth was occupied in collecting. The "Lady of the Lake" is a sort of *boudoir* ballad, yet it contains its element of common-sense and broad delineation. The exact position of Lowlander and Highlander would not be more aptly described in a set treatise than in the well-known lines:—

"Saxon, from yonder mountain high
I marked thee send delighted eye
Far to the south and east, where lay,

[1] Grote.

Extended in succession gay,
Deep waving fields and pastures green,
With gentle slopes and groves between:
These fertile plains, that softened vale,
Were once the birthright of the Gael.
The stranger came with iron hand,
And from our fathers reft the land.
Where dwell we now! See, rudely swell
Crag over crag, and fell o'er fell.
Ask we this savage hill we tread,
For fattened steer or household bread;
Ask we for flocks these shingles dry,—
And well the mountain might reply:
'To you, as to your sires of yore,
Belong the target and claymore;
I give you shelter in my breast,
Your own good blades must win the rest'.
Pent in this fortress of the North,
Think'st thou we will not sally forth
To spoil the spoiler as we may,
And from the robber rend the prey?
Ay, by my soul! While on yon plain
The Saxon rears one shock of grain;
While of ten thousand herds there strays
But one along yon river's maze;
The Gael, of plain and river heir,
Shall with strong hand redeem his share."

We need not search the same poem for specimens of the romantic element, for the whole poem is full of them. The incident in which Ellen discovers who Fitz-James really is, is perhaps excessively romantic. At any rate the lines,—

"To him each lady's look was lent;
On him each courtier's eye was bent;
Midst furs and silks and jewels sheen,
He stood in simple Lincoln green,
The centre of the glittering ring,
And Snowdoun's knight is Scotland's king,"—

may be cited as very sufficient example of the sort of sentimental incident which is separable from extreme feeling. When Scott, according to his own half-jesting but half-serious expression, was "beaten out of poetry" by Byron, he began to express in more pliable prose the same combination which

his verse had been used to convey. As might have been expected, the sense became in the novels more free, vigorous, and flowing, because it is less cramped by the vehicle in which it is conveyed. The range of character which can be adequately delineated in narrative verse is much narrower than that which can be described in the combination of narrative with dramatic prose; and perhaps even the sentiment of the novels is manlier and freer; a delicate unreality hovers over the "Lady of the Lake".

The sensible element, if we may so express it, of the Waverley Novels appears in various forms. One of the most striking is in the delineation of great political events and influential political institutions. We are not by any means about to contend that Scott is to be taken as an infallible or an impartial authority for the parts of history which he delineates. On the contrary, we believe all the world now agrees that there are many deductions to be made from, many exceptions to be taken to, the accuracy of his delineations. Still, whatever period or incident we take, we shall always find in the error a great, in one or two cases perhaps an extreme, mixture of the mental element which we term commonsense. The strongest *un*sensible feeling in Scott was perhaps his Jacobitism, which crept out even in small incidents and recurring prejudice throughout the whole of his active career, and was, so to say, the emotional aspect of his habitual Toryism. Yet no one can have given a more sensible delineation, we might say a more statesmanlike analysis, of the various causes which led to the momentary success, and to the speedy ruin, of the enterprise of Charles Edward.[1] Mr. Lockhart says, that notwithstanding Scott's imaginative readiness to exalt Scotland at the expense of England, no man would have been more willing to join in emphatic opposition to an anti-English party, if any such had presented itself with a practical object. Similarly his Jacobitism, though not without moments of real influence, passed away when his mind was directed to broad masses of fact, and general conclusions of political reasoning. A similar observation may be

[1] In *Waverley*.

made as to Scott's Toryism; although it is certain that there was an enthusiastic, and, in the malicious sense, poetical element in Scott's Toryism, yet quite as indisputably it partook largely of two other elements, which are in common repute prosaic. He shared abundantly in the love of administration and organisation, common to all men of great active powers. He liked to contemplate method at work and order in action. Everybody hates to hear that the Duke of Wellington asked "how the king's government was to be carried on". No amount of warning wisdom will bear so fearful a repetition. Still he *did* say it, and Scott had a sympathising foresight of the oracle before it was spoken. One element of his conservatism is his sympathy with the administrative arrangement, which is confused by the objections of a Whiggish opposition and is liable to be altogether destroyed by uprisings of the populace. His biographer, while pointing out the strong contrast between Scott and the argumentative and parliamentary statesmen of his age, avows his opinion that in other times, and with sufficient opportunities, Scott's ability in managing men would have enabled him to "play the part of Cecil or of Gondomar".[1] We may see how much a suppressed enthusiasm for such abilities breaks out, not only in the description of hereditary monarchs, where the sentiment might be ascribed to a different origin, but also in the delineation of upstart rulers, who could have no hereditary sanctity in the eyes of any Tory. Roland Græme, in *The Abbot*, is well described as losing in the presence of the Regent Murray the natural impertinence of his disposition. "He might have braved with indifference the presence of an earl merely distinguished by his belt and coronet; but he felt overawed in that of the soldier and statesman, the wielder of a nation's power, and the leader of her armies."[2] It is easy to perceive that the author shares the feeling of his hero by the evident pleasure with which he

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vol. v., chap. viii., *in re* Scott's management of the Highland pageant on George IV.'s visit to Scotland. (Forrest Morgan.)

[2] Chap. xviii.

dwells on the regent's demeanour: "He then turned slowly round toward Roland Græme, and the marks of gaiety, real or assumed, disappeared from his countenance as completely as the passing bubbles leave the dark mirror of a still profound lake into which the traveller has cast a stone; in the course of a minute his noble features had assumed their natural expression of melancholy gravity,"[1] etc. In real life, Scott used to say, that he never remembered feeling abashed in any one's presence except the Duke of Wellington's. Like that of the hero of his novel, his imagination was very susceptible to the influence of great achievements and prolonged success in wide-spreading affairs.

The view which Scott seems to have taken of democracy indicates exactly the same sort of application of a plain sense to the visible parts of the subject. His imagination was singularly penetrated with the strange varieties and motley composition of human life. The extraordinary multitude and striking contrast of the characters in his novels show this at once. And even more strikingly is the same habit of mind indicated "by a tendency never to omit an opportunity of describing those varied crowds and assemblages" which concentrate for a moment into a unity the scattered and unlike varieties of mankind. Thus, but a page or two before the passage which we alluded to in *The Abbot*, we find the following:—

"It was indeed no common sight to Roland, the vestibule of a palace, traversed by its various groups,—some radiant with gaiety—some pensive, and apparently weighed down by affairs concerning the State, or concerning themselves. Here the hoary statesman, with his cautious yet commanding look, his furred cloak and sable pantoufles; there the soldier in buff and steel, his long sword jarring against the pavement, and his whiskered upper lip and frowning brow looking an habitual defiance of danger, which perhaps was not always made good; there again passed my lord's serving-man, high of heart and bloody of hand, humble to his master and his master's equals, insolent to all others. To these might be added the poor suitor, with his anxious look and depressed mien—the officer, full of his brief authority, elbowing his betters, and possibly his benefactors, out of the road—the proud priest who sought a better benefice—

[1] Chap. xviii.

the proud baron, who sought a grant of Church lands—the robber chief, who came to solicit a pardon for the injuries he had inflicted on his neighbours—the plundered franklin, who came to seek vengeance for that which he had himself received. Besides, there was the mustering and disposition of guards and soldiers—the despatching of messengers, and the receiving them—the trampling and neighing of horses without the gate—the flashing of arms, and rustling of plumes, and jingling of spurs within it. In short, it was that gay and splendid confusion, in which the eye of youth sees all that is brave and brilliant, and that of experience much that is doubtful, deceitful, false, and hollow—hopes that will never be gratified—promises which will never be fulfilled—pride in the disguise of humility—and insolence in that of frank and generous bounty." [1]

As in the imagination of Shakespeare, so in that of Scott, the principal form and object were the structure—that is a hard word—the undulation and diversified composition of human society; the picture of this stood in the centre, and everything else was accessory and secondary to it. The old "rows of books," in which Scott so peculiarly delighted, were made to contribute their element to this varied imagination of humanity. From old family histories, odd memoirs, old law-trials, his fancy elicited new traits to add to the motley assemblage. His objection to democracy—an objection of which we can only appreciate the emphatic force, when we remember that his youth was contemporary with the first French Revolution, and the controversy as to the uniform and stereotyped rights of man—was, that it would sweep away this entire picture, level prince and peasant in a common *égalité*,—substitute a scientific rigidity for the irregular and picturesque growth of centuries,—replace an abounding and genial life by a symmetrical but lifeless mechanism. All the descriptions of society in the novels,—whether of feudal society, of modern Scotch society or of English society,—are largely coloured by this feeling. It peeps out everywhere, and liberal critics have endeavoured to show that it was a narrow Toryism; but in reality, it is a subtle compound of the natural instinct of the artist with the plain sagacity of the man of the world.

It would be tedious to show how clearly the same sagacity appears in his delineation of the various great events and

[1] Chap. xviii., 3rd paragraph.

movements in society which are described in the Scotch novels. There is scarcely one of them which does not bear it on its surface. Objections may, as we shall show, be urged against the delineation which Scott has given of the Puritan resistance and rebellions, yet scarcely any one will say there is not a worldly sense in it. On the contrary, the very objection is, that it is too worldly, and far too exclusively sensible.

The same thoroughly well-grounded sagacity and comprehensive appreciation of human life is shown in the treatment of what we may call *anomalous* characters. In general, monstrosity is no topic for art. Every one has known in real life characters which if, apart from much experience, he had found described in books, he would have thought unnatural and impossible. Scott, however, abounds in such characters. Meg Merrilies, Edie Ochiltree, Radcliffe,[1] are more or less of that description. That of Meg Merrilies especially is as distorted and eccentric as anything can be. Her appearance is described as making Mannering "start"; and well it might.

> "She was full six feet high, wore a man's greatcoat over the rest of her dress, had in her hand a goodly sloethorn cudgel, and in all points of equipment except her petticoats seemed rather masculine than feminine. Her dark elf-locks shot out like the snakes of the gorgon between an old-fashioned bonnet called a bongrace, heightening the singular effect of her strong and weather-beaten features, which they partly shadowed, while her eye had a wild roll that indicated something of insanity."[2]

Her career in the tale corresponds with the strangeness of her exterior. "Harlot, thief, witch, and gipsy," as she describes herself, the hero is preserved by her virtues; half-crazed as she is described to be, he owes his safety on more than one occasion to her skill in stratagem, and ability in managing those with whom she is connected, and who are most likely to be familiar with her weakness and to detect her craft. Yet on hardly any occasion is the natural reader conscious of this strangeness. Something is of course attributable to the skill of the artist; for no other power of mind could produce the effect, unless it were aided by the un-

[1] In *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.
[2] *Guy Mannering*, chap. iii.

conscious tact of detailed expression. But the fundamental explanation of this remarkable success is the distinctness with which Scott saw how such a character as Meg Merrilies arose and was produced out of the peculiar circumstances of gipsy life in the localities in which he has placed his scene. He has exhibited this to his readers not by lengthy or elaborate description, but by chosen incidents, short comments, and touches of which he scarcely foresaw the effect. This is the only way in which the fundamental objection to making eccentricity the subject of artistic treatment can be obviated. Monstrosity ceases to be such when we discern the laws of Nature which evolve it: when a real science explains its phenomena, we find that it is in strict accordance with what we call the natural type, but that some rare adjunct or uncommon casualty has interfered and distorted a nature which is really the same, into a phenomenon which is altogether different. Just so with eccentricity in human character; it becomes a topic of literary art only when its identity with the ordinary principles of human nature is exhibited in the midst of, and as it were by means of, the superficial unlikeness. Such a skill, however, requires an easy careless familiarity with usual human life and common human conduct. A writer must have a sympathy with health before he can show us how, and where, and to what extent, that which is unhealthy deviates from it; and it is this consistent acquaintance with regular life which makes the irregular characters of Scott so happy a contrast to the uneasy distortions of less sagacious novelists.

A good deal of the same criticism may be applied to the delineation which Scott has given us of the *poor*. In truth, poverty is an anomaly to rich people. It is very difficult to make out why people who want dinner do not ring the bell. One half of the world, according to the saying, do not know how the other half lives. Accordingly, nothing is so rare in fiction as a good delineation of the poor. Though perpetually with us in reality, we rarely meet them in our reading. The requirements of the case present an unusual difficulty to artistic delineation. A good deal of the character of the poor is an

unfit topic for continuous art, and yet we wish to have in our books a life-like exhibition of the whole of that character. Mean manners and mean vices are unfit for prolonged delineation; the every-day pressure of narrow necessities is too petty a pain and too anxious a reality to be dwelt upon. We can bear the mere description of the *Parish Register*—

> "But this poor farce has neither truth nor art
> To please the fancy or to touch the heart.
> Dark but not awful, dismal but yet mean,
> With anxious bustle moves the cumbrous scene;
> Presents no objects tender or profound,
> But spreads its cold unmeaning gloom around;"—

but who could bear to have a long narrative of fortunes "dismal but yet mean," with characters "dark but not awful," and no objects "tender or profound"? Mr. Dickens has in various parts of his writings been led by a sort of pre-Raphaelite *cultus* of reality into an error of this species. His poor people have taken to their poverty very thoroughly; they are poor talkers and poor livers, and in all ways poor people to read about. A whole array of writers have fallen into an opposite mistake. Wishing to preserve their delineations clear from the defects of meanness and vulgarity, they have attributed to the poor a fancied happiness and Arcadian simplicity. The conventional shepherd of ancient times was scarcely displeasing: that which is by everything except express avowal removed from the sphere of reality does not annoy us by its deviations from reality; but the fictitious poor of sentimental novelists are brought almost into contact with real life, half claim to be copies of what actually exists at our very doors, are introduced in close proximity to characters moving in a higher rank, over whom no such ideal charm is diffused, and who are painted with as much truth as the writer's ability enables him to give. Accordingly, the contrast is evident and displeasing: the harsh outlines of poverty will not bear the artificial rose-tint; they are seen through it, like high cheek-bones through the delicate colours of artificial youth; we turn away with some disgust from the false elegance and undeceiving art; we prefer the rough poor of

nature to the petted poor of the refining describer. Scott has most felicitously avoided both these errors. His poor people are never coarse and never vulgar; their lineaments have the rude traits which a life of conflict will inevitably leave on the minds and manners of those who are to lead it; their notions have the narrowness which is inseparable from a contracted experience; their knowledge is not more extended than their restricted means of attaining it would render possible. Almost alone among novelists Scott has given a thorough, minute, life-like description of poor persons, which is at the same time genial and pleasing. The reason seems to be, that the firm sagacity of his genius comprehended the industrial aspect of poor people's life thoroughly and comprehensively, his experience brought it before him easily and naturally, and his artist's mind and genial disposition enabled him to dwell on those features which would be most pleasing to the world in general. In fact, his own mind of itself and by its own nature dwelt on those very peculiarities. He could not remove his firm and instructed genius into the domain of Arcadian unreality, but he was equally unable to dwell principally, peculiarly, or consecutively, on those petty, vulgar, mean details in which such a writer as Crabbe lives and breathes. Hazlitt said that Crabbe described a poor man's cottage like a man who came to distrain for rent; he catalogued every trivial piece of furniture, defects and cracks and all. Scott describes it as a cheerful but most sensible landlord would describe a cottage on his property: he has a pleasure in it. No detail, or few details, in the life of the inmates escape his experienced and interested eye; but he dwells on those which do not displease him. He sympathises with their rough industry and plain joys and sorrows. He does not fatigue himself or excite their wondering smile by theoretical plans of impossible relief. He makes the best of the life which is given, and by a sanguine sympathy makes it still better. A hard life many characters in Scott seem to lead; but he appreciates, and makes his reader appreciate, the full value of natural feelings, plain thoughts, and applied sagacity.

His ideas of political economy are equally characteristic of his strong sense and genial mind. He was always sneering at Adam Smith, and telling many legends of that philosopher's absence of mind and inaptitude for the ordinary conduct of life. A contact with the Edinburgh logicians had, doubtless, not augmented his faith in the formal deductions of abstract economy; nevertheless, with the facts before him, he could give a very plain and satisfactory exposition of the genial consequences of old abuses, the distinct necessity for stern reform, and the delicate humanity requisite for introducing that reform temperately and with feeling:—

"Even so the Laird of Ellangowan ruthlessly commenced his magisterial reform, at the expense of various established and superannuated pickers and stealers, who had been his neighbours for half a century. He wrought his miracles like a second Duke Humphrey; and by the influence of the beadle's rod, caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the palsied to labour. He detected poachers, black-fishers, orchard-breakers, and pigeon-shooters; had the applause of the bench for his reward, and the public credit of an active magistrate.

"All this good had its rateable proportion of evil. Even an admitted nuisance, of ancient standing, should not be abated without some caution. The zeal of our worthy friend now involved in great distress sundry personages whose idle and mendicant habits his own *lâchesse* had contributed to foster, until these habits had become irreclaimable, or whose real incapacity for exertion rendered them fit objects, in their own phrase, for the charity of all well-disposed Christians. The 'long-remembered beggar,' who for twenty years had made his regular rounds within the neighbourhood, received rather as an humble friend than as an object of charity, was sent to the neighbouring workhouse. The decrepit dame, who travelled round the parish upon a hand-barrow, circulating from house to house like a bad shilling, which every one is in haste to pass to his neighbour; she who used to call for her bearers as loud, or louder, than a traveller demands post-horses, even she shared the same disastrous fate. The 'daft Jock,' who, half knave, half idiot, had been the sport of each succeeding race of village children for a good part of a century, was remitted to the county bridewell, where, secluded from free air and sunshine, the only advantages he was capable of enjoying, he pined and died in the course of six months. The old sailor, who had so long rejoiced the smoky rafters of every kitchen in the country, by singing 'Captain Ward' and 'Bold Admiral Benbow,' was banished from the county for no better reason than that he was supposed to speak with a strong Irish accent. Even the annual rounds of the pedlar were abolished by the Justice, in his hasty zeal for the administration of rural police.

"These things did not pass without notice and censure. We are not made of wood or stone, and the things which connect themselves with our hearts and habits cannot, like bark or lichen, be rent away without our missing them. The farmer's dame lacked her usual share of intelligence, perhaps also the self-applause which she had felt while distributing the *awmous* (alms), in shape of a *gowpen* (handful) of oatmeal, to the mendicant who brought the news. The cottage felt inconvenience from interruption of the petty trade carried on by the itinerant dealers. The children lacked their supply of sugar-plums and toys; the young women wanted pins, ribbons, combs, and ballads; and the old could no longer barter their eggs for salt, snuff, and tobacco. All these circumstances brought the busy Laird of Ellangowan into discredit, which was the more general on account of his former popularity. Even his lineage was brought up in judgment against him. They thought 'naething of what the like of Greenside, or Burnville, or Viewforth, might do, that were strangers in the country; but Ellangowan! that had been a name amang them since the mirk Monanday, and lang before—*him* to be grinding the puir at that rate!—They ca'd his grandfather the Wicked Laird; but, though he was whiles fractious aneuch, when he got into roving company, and had ta'en the drap drink, he would have scorned to gang on at this gate. Na, na, the muckle chumley in the Auld Place reeked like a killogie in his time, and there were as mony puir folk riving at the banes in the court and about the door, as there were gentles in the ha'. And the leddy, on ilka Christmas night as it came round, gae twelve siller pennies to ilka puir body about, in honour of the twelve apostles like. They were fond to ca' it papistrie; but I think our great folk might take a lesson frae the papists whiles. They gie another sort o' help to puir folk than just dinging down a saxpence in the brod on the Sabbath, and kilting, and scourging, and drumming them a' the sax days o' the week besides.'"[1]

Many other indications of the same healthy and natural sense, which gives so much of their characteristic charm to the Scotch novels, might be pointed out, if it were necessary to weary our readers by dwelling longer on a point we have already laboured so much. One more, however, demands notice because of its importance, and perhaps also because, from its somewhat less obvious character, it might otherwise escape without notice. There has been frequent controversy as to the penal code, if we may so call it, of fiction; that is, as to the apportionment of reward and punishment respectively to the good and evil personages therein delineated; and the

[1] *Guy Mannering*, chap. vi.

practice of authors has been as various as the legislation of critics. One school abandons all thought on the matter, and declares that in the real life we see around us, good people often fail, and wicked people continually prosper; and would deduce the precept, that it is unwise in an art which should "hold the mirror up to nature,"[1] not to copy the uncertain and irregular distribution of its sanctions. Another school, with an exactness which savours at times of pedantry, apportions the success and the failure, the pain and the pleasure of fictitious life, to the moral qualities of those who are living in it—does not think at all, or but little, of any other quality in those characters, and does not at all care whether the penalty and reward are evolved in natural sequence from the circumstances and characters of the tale, or are owing to some monstrous accident far removed from all relation of cause or consequence to those facts and people. Both these classes of writers produce works which jar on the natural sense of common readers, and are at issue with the analytic criticism of the best critics. One school leaves an impression of an uncared-for world, in which there is no right and no wrong; the other, of a sort of Governesses' Institution of a world, where all praise and all blame, all good and all pain, are made to turn on special graces and petty offences, pesteringly spoken of and teasingly watched for. The manner of Scott is thoroughly different; you can scarcely lay down any novel of his without a strong feeling that the world in which the fiction has been laid, and in which your imagination has been moving, is one subject to laws of retribution which, though not apparent on a superficial glance, are yet in steady and consistent operation, and will be quite sure to work their due effect, if time is only given to them. Sagacious men know that this is in its best aspect the condition of life. Certain of the ungodly may, notwithstanding the Psalmist, flourish even through life like a green bay-tree; for providence, in external appearance (far differently from the real truth of things, as we may one day see it), works by a scheme of averages. Most people who ought to succeed, do succeed; most people who do fail, ought to fail. But there is

[1] "Hamlet," iii. 2.

no exact adjustment of "mark" to merit; the competitive examination system appears to have an origin more recent than the creation of the world;—"on the whole," "speaking generally," "looking at life as a whole," are the words in which we must describe the providential adjustment of visible good and evil to visible goodness and badness. And when we look more closely, we see that these general results are the consequences of certain principles which work half unseen, and which are effectual in the main, though thwarted here and there. It is this comprehensive though inexact distribution of good and evil, which is suited to the novelist, and it is exactly this which Scott instinctively adopted. Taking a firm and genial view of the common facts of life,—seeing it as an experienced observer and tried man of action,—he could not help giving the representation of it which is insensibly borne in on the minds of such persons. He delineates it as a world moving according to laws which are always producing their effect, never *have* produced it; sometimes fall short a little; are always nearly successful. Good sense produces its effect, as well as good intention; ability is valuable as well as virtue. It is this peculiarity which gives to his works, more than anything else, the lifelikeness which distinguishes them; the average of the copy is struck on the same scale as that of reality; an unexplained, uncommented-on adjustment works in the one, just as a hidden, imperceptible principle of apportionment operates in the other.

The romantic susceptibility of Scott's imagination is as obvious in his novels as his matter-of-fact sagacity. We can find much of it in the place in which we should naturally look first for it,—his treatment of his heroines. We are no indiscriminate admirers of these young ladies, and shall shortly try to show how much they are inferior as imaginative creations to similar creations of the very highest artists. But the mode in which the writer speaks of them everywhere indicates an imagination continually under the illusion which we term romance. A gentle tone of manly admiration pervades the whole delineation of their words and actions. If we look carefully at the narratives of some remarkable female novelists—it would be invidious to give the instances by name—we shall be struck at

once with the absence of this; they do not half like their heroines. It would be satirical to say that they were jealous of them; but it is certain that they analyse the mode in which their charms produce their effects, and the *minutiæ* of their operation, much in the same way in which a slightly jealous lady examines the claims of the heroines of society. The same writers have invented the atrocious species of plain heroines. Possibly none of the frauds which are now so much the topic of common remark are so irritating, as that to which the purchaser of a novel is a victim on finding that he has only to peruse a narrative of the conduct and sentiments of an ugly lady. "Two-and-sixpence to know the heart which has high cheek-bones!" Was there ever such an imposition? Scott would have recoiled from such a conception. Even Jeanie Deans,[1] though no heroine, like Flora Macivor,[2] is described as "comely," and capable of looking almost pretty when required, and she has a compensating set-off in her sister, who is beautiful as well as unwise. Speaking generally, as is the necessity of criticism, Scott makes his heroines, at least by profession, attractive, and dwells on their attractiveness, though not with the wild ecstasy of insane youth, yet with the tempered and mellow admiration common to genial men of this world. Perhaps at times we are rather displeased at his explicitness, and disposed to hang back and carp at the admirable qualities displayed to us. But this is only a stronger evidence of the peculiarity which we speak of,—of the unconscious sentiments, inseparable from Scott's imagination.

The same romantic tinge undeniably shows itself in Scott's pictures of the past. Many exceptions have been taken to the detail of mediæval life as it is described to us in *Ivanhoe;* but one merit will always remain to it, and will be enough to secure to it immense popularity. It describes the middle ages as we should have wished them to have been. We do not mean that the delineation satisfies those accomplished admirers of the old Church system who fancy that they have found among the prelates and barons of the fourteenth century a close approximation to the theocracy which they would re-

[1] In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian.* [2] In *Waverley.*

commend for our adoption. On the contrary, the theological merits of the middle ages are not prominent in Scott's delineation. "Dogma" was not in his way: a cheerful man of the world is not anxious for a precise definition of peculiar doctrines. The charm of *Ivanhoe* is addressed to a simpler sort of imagination, to that kind of boyish fancy which idolises mediæval society as the "fighting time". Every boy has heard of tournaments, and has a firm persuasion that in an age of tournaments, life was thoroughly well understood. A martial society, where men fought hand to hand on good horses with large lances, in peace for pleasure, and in war for business, seems the very ideal of perfection to a bold and simply fanciful boy. *Ivanhoe* spreads before him the full landscape of such a realm, with Richard Cœur-de-Lion, a black horse, and the passage of arms at Ashby. Of course he admires it, and thinks there was never such a writer, and will never more be such a world. And a mature critic will share his admiration, at least to the extent of admitting that nowhere else have the elements of a martial romance been so gorgeously accumulated without becoming oppressive; their fanciful charm been so powerfully delineated, and yet so constantly relieved by touches of vigorous sagacity. One single fact shows how great the romantic illusion is. The pressure of painful necessity is scarcely so great in this novel, as in novels of the same writer in which the scene is laid in modern times. Much may be said in favour of the mediæval system as contradistinguished from existing society; much has been said. But no one can maintain that general comfort was as much diffused as it is now. A certain ease pervades the structure of later society. Our houses may not last so long, are not so picturesque, will leave no such ruins behind them; but they are warmed with hot water, have no draughts, and contain sofas instead of rushes. A slight daily unconscious luxury is hardly ever wanting to the dwellers in civilisation; like the gentle air of a genial climate, it is a perpetual minute enjoyment. The absence of this marks a rude barbaric time. We may avail ourselves of rough pleasures, stirring amusements, exciting actions, strange rumours; but life is hard and harsh. The cold air of the keen North may brace and invigorate, but

it cannot soothe us. All sensible people know that the middle ages must have been very uncomfortable; there was a difficulty about "good food";—almost insuperable obstacles to the cultivation of nice detail and small enjoyment. No one knew the abstract facts on which this conclusion rests better than Scott; but his delineation gives no general idea of the result. A thoughtless reader rises with the impression that the middle ages had the same elements of happiness which we have at present, and that they had fighting besides. We do not assert that this tenet is explicitly taught; on the contrary, many facts are explained, and many customs elucidated from which a discriminating and deducing reader would infer the meanness of poverty and the harshness of barbarism. But these less imposing traits escape the the rapid, and still more the boyish reader. His general impression is one of romance; and though, when roused, Scott was quite able to take a distinct view of the opposing facts, he liked his own mind to rest for the most part in the same pleasing illusion.

The same sort of historical romance is shown likewise in Scott's picture of remarkable historical characters. His Richard I. is the traditional Richard, with traits heightened and ennobled in perfect conformity to the spirit of tradition. Some illustration of the same quality might be drawn from his delineations of the Puritan rebellions and the Cavalier enthusiasm. We might show that he ever dwells on the traits and incidents most attractive to a genial and spirited imagination. But the most remarkable instance of the power which romantic illusion exercised over him, is his delineation of Mary Queen of Scots. He refused at one time of his life to write a biography of that princess "because his opinion was contrary to his feeling". He evidently considered her guilt to be clearly established, and thought, with a distinguished lawyer, that he should "direct a jury to find her guilty"; but his fancy, like that of most of his countrymen, took a peculiar and special interest in the beautiful lady who, at any rate, had suffered so much and so fatally at the hands of a queen of England. He could not bring himself to dwell with nice accuracy on the evidence which substantiates her criminality, or on the still clearer indications

of that unsound and over-crafty judgment, which was the fatal inheritance of the Stuart family, and which, in spite of advantages that scarcely any other family in the world has enjoyed, has made their name a historical by-word for misfortune. The picture in *The Abbot*, one of the best historical pictures which Scott has given us, is principally the picture of the queen as the fond tradition of his countrymen exhibited her. Her entire innocence, it is true, is never alleged: but the enthusiasm of her followers is dwelt on with approving sympathy; their confidence is set forth at large; her influence over them is skilfully delineated; the fascination of charms chastened by misfortune is delicately indicated. We see a complete picture of the beautiful queen, of the suffering and sorrowful, but yet not insensible woman. Scott could not, however, as a close study will show us, quite conceal the unfavourable nature of his fundamental opinion. In one remarkable passage the struggle of the judgment is even conspicuous, and in others the sagacity of the practised lawyer,—the "thread of the attorney," as he used to call it, in his nature,—qualifies and modifies the sentiment hereditary in his countrymen, and congenial to himself.

This romantic imagination is a habit of power (as we may choose to call it) of mind which is almost essential to the highest success in the historical novel. The aim, at any rate the effect, of this class of works seems to be to deepen and confirm the received view of historical personages. A great and acute writer may, from an accurate study of original documents, discover that those impressions are erroneous, and by a process of elaborate argument substitute others which he deems more accurate. But this can only be effected by writing a regular history. The essence of the achievement is the proof. If Mr. Froude had put forward his view of Henry VIII.'s character in a professed novel, he would have been laughed at. It is only by a rigid adherence to attested facts and authentic documents, that a view so original could obtain even a hearing. We start back with a little anger from a representation which is avowedly imaginative, and which contradicts our impressions. We do not like to have our opinions disturbed by reasoning; but it is impertinent to attempt to disturb them by

fancies. A writer of the historical novel is bound by the popular conception of his subject; and commonly it will be found that this popular impression is to some extent a romantic one. An element of exaggeration clings to the popular judgment: great vices are made greater, great virtues greater also; interesting incidents are made more interesting, soft legends more soft. The novelist who disregards this tendency will do so at the peril of his popularity. His business is to make attraction more attractive, and not to impair the pleasant pictures of ready-made romance by an attempt at grim reality.

We may therefore sum up the indications of this characteristic excellence of Scott's novels by saying, that more than any novelist he has given us fresh pictures of practical human society, with its cares and troubles, its excitements and its pleasures; that he has delineated more distinctly than any one else the framework in which this society inheres, and by the boundaries of which it is shaped and limited; that he has made more clear the way in which strange and eccentric characters grow out of that ordinary and usual system of life; that he has extended his view over several periods of society, and given an animated description of the external appearance of each, and a firm representation of its social institutions; that he has shown very graphically what we may call the worldly laws of moral government; and that over all these he has spread the glow of sentiment natural to a manly mind, and an atmosphere of generosity congenial to a cheerful one. It is from the collective effect of these causes, and from the union of sense and sentiment which is the principle of them all, that Scott derives the peculiar healthiness which distinguishes him. There are no such books as his for the sick-room, or for freshening the painful intervals of a morbid mind. Mere sense is dull, mere sentiment unsubstantial; a sensation of genial healthiness is only given by what combines the solidity of the one and the brightening charm of the other.

Some guide to Scott's defects, or to the limitations of his genius, if we would employ a less ungenial and perhaps

more correct expression, is to be discovered, as usual, from the consideration of his characteristic excellence. As it is his merit to give bold and animated pictures of this world, it is his defect to give but insufficient representations of qualities which this world does not exceedingly prize,—of such as do not thrust themselves very forward in it,—of such as are in some sense above it. We may illustrate this in several ways.

One of the parts of human nature which are systematically omitted in Scott, is the searching and abstract intellect. This did not lie in his way. No man had a stronger sagacity, better adapted for the guidance of common men, and the conduct of common transactions. Few could hope to form a more correct opinion on things and subjects which were brought before him in actual life; no man had a more useful intellect. But on the other hand, as will be generally observed to be the case, no one was less inclined to that probing and seeking and anxious inquiry into things in general which is the necessity of some minds, and a sort of intellectual famine in their nature. He had no call to investigate the theory of the universe, and he would not have been able to comprehend those who did. Such a mind as Shelley's would have been entirely removed from his comprehension. He had no call to mix "awful talk and asking looks" [1] with his love of the visible scene. He could not have addressed the universe:—

> "I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are." [2]

Such thoughts would have been to him "thinking without an object," "abstracted speculations," "cobwebs of the unintelligible brain". Above all minds, his had the Baconian

[1] Shelley, "Alastor". [2] *Ibid.*

propensity to work upon "stuff". At first sight, it would not seem that this was a defect likely to be very hurtful to the works of a novelist. The labours of the searching and introspective intellect, however needful, absorbing, and in some degree delicious, to the seeker himself, are not in general very delightful to those who are not seeking. Genial men in middle life are commonly intolerant of that philosophising which their prototype, in old times, classed side by side with the lisping of youth. The theological novel, which was a few years ago so popular, and which is likely to have a recurring influence in times when men's belief is unsettled, and persons who cannot or will not read large treatises have thoughts in their minds and inquiries in their hearts, suggests to those who are accustomed to it the absence elsewhere of what is necessarily one of its most distinctive and prominent subjects. The desire to attain a belief, which has become one of the most familiar sentiments of heroes and heroines, would have seemed utterly incongruous to the plain sagacity of Scott, and also to his old-fashioned art. Creeds are *data* in his novels; people have different creeds, but each keeps his own. Some persons will think that this is not altogether amiss; nor do we particularly wish to take up the defence of the dogmatic novel. Nevertheless, it will strike those who are accustomed to the youthful generation of a cultivated time, that the passion of intellectual inquiry is one of the strongest impulses in many of them, and one of those which give the predominant colouring to the conversation and exterior mind of many more. And a novelist will not exercise the most potent influence over those subject to that passion, if he entirely omit the delineation of it. Scott's works have only one merit in this relation: they are an excellent rest to those who have felt this passion, and have had something too much of it.

The same indisposition to the abstract exercises of the intellect shows itself in the reflective portions of Scott's novels, and perhaps contributes to their popularity with that immense majority of the world who strongly share in that same indisposition: it prevents, however, their having the most powerful intellectual influence on those who have at any

time of their lives voluntarily submitted themselves to this acute and refining discipline. The reflections of a practised thinker have a peculiar charm, like the last touches of the accomplished artist. The cunning exactitude of the professional hand leaves a trace in the very language. A nice discrimination of thought makes men solicitous of the most apt expressions to diffuse their thoughts. Both words and meaning gain a metallic brilliancy, like the glittering precision of the pure Attic air. Scott's is a healthy and genial world of reflection, but it wants the charm of delicate exactitude.

The same limitation of Scott's genius shows itself in a very different portion of art—in his delineation of his heroines. The same blunt sagacity of imagination which fitted him to excel in the rough description of obvious life, rather unfitted him for delineating the less substantial essence of the female character. The nice *minutiæ* of society, by means of which female novelists have been so successful in delineating their own sex, were rather too small for his robust and powerful mind. Perhaps, too, a certain unworldliness of *imagination* is necessary to enable men to comprehend or delineate that essence: unworldliness of *life* is no doubt not requisite; rather, perhaps, worldliness is necessary to the acquisition of a sufficient experience. But an absorption in the practical world does not seem favourable to a comprehension of anything which does not precisely belong to it. Its interests are too engrossing; its excitements too keen; it modifies the fancy, and in the change unfits it for everything else. Something, too, in Scott's character and history made it more difficult for him to give a representation of women than of men. Goethe used to say, that his idea of woman was not drawn from his experience, but that it came to him before experience, and that he explained his experience by a reference to it.[1] And though this is a German, and not very happy, form of expression, yet it appears to indicate a very important distinction. Some efforts of the imagination are made so early in life, just as it were at the dawn of the conscious faculties, that we are never able to fancy ourselves as destitute of them. They are

[1] Conversations with Eckermann and Soret, 22nd Oct., 1828.

part of the mental constitution with which, so to speak, we awoke to existence. These are always far more firm, vivid, and definite, than any other images of our fancy; and we apply them, half unconsciously, to any facts and sentiments and actions which may occur to us later in life, whether arising from within or thrust upon us from the outward world. Goethe doubtless meant that the idea of the female character was to him one of these first elements of imagination; not a thing puzzled out, or which he remembered having conceived, but a part of the primitive conceptions which, being coeval with his memory, seemed inseparable from his consciousness. The descriptions of women likely to be given by this sort of imagination will probably be the best descriptions. A mind which would arrive at this idea of the female character by this process, and so early, would be one obviously of more than usual susceptibility. The early imagination does not commonly take this direction; it thinks most of horses and lances, tournaments and knights; only a mind with an unusual and instinctive tendency to this kind of thought, would be borne thither so early or so effectually. And even independently of this probable peculiarity of the individual, the primitive imagination in general is likely to be the most accurate which men can form; not, of course, of the external manifestations and detailed manners, but of the inner sentiment and characteristic feeling of women. The early imagination conceives what it does conceive very justly; fresh from the facts, stirred by the new aspect of things, undimmed by the daily passage of constantly forgotten images, not misled by the irregular analogies of a dislocated life,—the early mind sees what it does see with a spirit and an intentness never given to it again. A mind like Goethe's, of very strong imagination, aroused at the earliest age,—not of course by passions, but by an unusual strength in that undefined longing which is the prelude to our passions,—will form the best idea of the inmost female nature which masculine nature can form. The difference is evident between the characters of women formed by Goethe's imagination or Shakespeare's, and those formed by such an imagination as that of Scott. The latter seem so external.

We have traits, features, manners; we know the heroine as she appeared in the street; in some degree we know how she talked, but we never know how she felt—least of all what she was: we always feel there is a world behind, unanalysed, unrepresented, which we cannot attain to. Such a character as Margaret in "Faust" is known to us to the very soul; so is Imogen; so is Ophelia. Edith Bellenden, Flora Macivor, Miss Wardour,[1] are young ladies who, we are told, were good-looking, and well dressed (according to the old fashion), and sensible; but we feel we know but very little of them, and they do not haunt our imaginations. The failure of Scott in this line of art is more conspicuous, because he had not in any remarkable degree the later experience of female detail, with which some minds have endeavoured to supply the want of the early essential imagination, and which Goethe possessed in addition to it. It was rather late, according to his biographer, before Scott set up for a "squire of dames"; he was a "lame young man, very enthusiastic about ballad poetry"; he was deeply in love with a young lady, supposed to be imaginatively represented by Flora Macivor, but he was unsuccessful. It would be over-ingenious to argue, from his failing in a single love-affair, that he had no peculiar interest in young ladies in general; but the whole description of his youth shows that young ladies exercised over him a rather more divided influence than is usual. Other pursuits intervened, much more than is common with persons of imaginative temperament, and he never led the life of flirtation from which Goethe believed that he derived so much instruction. Scott's heroines, therefore, are, not unnaturally, faulty, since from a want of the very peculiar instinctive imagination he could not give us the essence of women, and from the habits of his life he could not delineate to us their detailed life with the appreciative accuracy of habitual experience. Jeanie Deans is probably the best of his heroines, and she is so because she is the least of a heroine. The plain matter-of-fact element in the peasant-girl's life and circumstances suited a robust imagination. There is little in the part of her character that is very finely described which is

[1] In *Old Mortality*, *Waverley* and *The Antiquary*.

characteristically feminine. She is not a masculine, but she is an epicene heroine. Her love-affair with Butler, a single remarkable scene excepted, is rather commonplace than otherwise.

A similar criticism might be applied to Scott's heroes. Every one feels how commonplace they are—Waverley excepted, whose very vacillation gives him a sort of character. They have little personality. They are all of the same type; —excellent young men—rather strong—able to ride and climb and jump. They are always said to be sensible, and bear out the character by being not unwilling sometimes to talk platitudes. But we know nothing of their inner life. They are said to be in love; but we have no special account of their individual sentiments. People show their character in their love more than in anything else. These young gentlemen all love in the same way—in the vague commonplace way of this world. We have no sketch or dramatic expression of the life within. Their souls are quite unknown to us. If there is an exception, it is Edgar Ravenswood.[1] But if we look closely, we may observe that the notion which we obtain of his character, unusually broad as it is, is not a notion of him in his capacity of hero, but in his capacity of distressed peer. His proud poverty gives a distinctness which otherwise his lineaments would not have. We think little of his love; we think much of his narrow circumstances and compressed haughtiness.

The same exterior delineation of character shows itself in his treatment of men's religious nature. A novelist is scarcely, in the notion of ordinary readers, bound to deal with this at all; if he does, it will be one of his great difficulties to indicate it graphically, yet without dwelling on it. Men who purchase a novel do not wish a stone or a sermon. All lengthened reflections must be omitted; the whole armoury of pulpit eloquence. But no delineation of human nature can be considered complete which omits to deal with man in relation to the questions which occupy him as man, with his convictions as to the theory of the universe and his own destiny; the human

[1] In *The Bride of Lammermoor.*

heart throbs on few subjects with a passion so intense, so peculiar, and so typical. From an artistic view, it is a blunder to omit an element which is so characteristic of human life, which contributes so much to its animation, and which is so picturesque. A reader of a more simple mind, little apt to indulge in such criticism, feels "a want of depth," as he would speak, in delineations from which so large an element of his own most passionate and deepest nature is omitted. It can hardly be said that there is an omission of the religious nature in Scott. But, at the same time, there is no adequate delineation of it. If we refer to the facts of his life, and the view of his character which we collect from them, we shall find that his religion was of a qualified and double sort. He was a genial man of the world, and had the easy faith in the kindly[1] *Dieu des bonnes gens*, which is natural to such a person; and he had also a half-poetic principle of superstition in his nature, inclining him to believe in ghosts, legends, fairies, and elves, which did not affect his daily life, or possibly his superficial belief, but was nevertheless very constantly present to his fancy, and which affected, as is the constitution of human nature, through that frequency, the undefined, half-expressed, inexpressible feelings which are at the root of that belief. Superstition was a kind of Jacobitism in his religion; as a sort of absurd reliance on the hereditary principle modified insensibly his leanings in the practical world, so a belief in the existence of unevidenced, and often absurd, supernatural beings qualified his commonest speculations on the higher world. Both these elements may be thought to enter into the highest religion; there is a principle of cheerfulness which will justify in its measure a genial enjoyment, and also a principle of fear which those who think only of that enjoyment will deem superstition, and which will really become superstition in the over-anxious and credulous acceptor of it. But in a true religion these two elements will be combined. The character of God images itself very imperfectly in any human soul; but in the highest it images itself as a whole; it leaves an abiding impression which will justify anxiety and allow of happi-

[1] Béranger.

ness. The highest aim of the religious novelist would be to show how this operates in human character; to exhibit in their curious modification our religious love, and also our religious fear. In the novels of Scott the two elements appear in a state of separation, as they did in his own mind. We have the superstition of the peasantry in *The Antiquary*, in *Guy Mannering*, everywhere almost; we have likewise a pervading tone of genial easy reflection characteristic of the man of the world who produced, and agreeable to the people of the world who read, these works. But we have no picture of the two in combination. We are scarcely led to think on the subject at all, so much do other subjects distract our interest; but if we do think, we are puzzled at the contrast. We do not know which is true, the uneasy belief of superstition, or the easy satisfaction of the world; we waver between the two, and have no suggestion even hinted to us of the possibility of a reconciliation. The character of the Puritans certainly did not in general embody such a reconciliation, but it might have been made by a sympathising artist the vehicle for a delineation of a struggle after it. The two elements of love and fear ranked side by side in their minds with an intensity which is rare even in minds that feel only one of them. The delineation of Scott is amusing, but superficial. He caught the ludicrous traits which tempt the mirthful imagination, but no other side of the character pleased him. The man of the world was displeased with their obstinate interfering zeal; their intensity of faith was an opposition force in the old Scotch polity, of which he liked to fancy the harmonious working. They were superstitious enough; but nobody likes other people's superstitions. Scott's were of a wholly different kind. He made no difficulty as to the observance of Christmas Day, and would have eaten potatoes without the faintest scruple, although their name does not occur in Scripture. Doubtless also his residence in the land of Puritanism did not incline him to give anything except a satirical representation of that belief. You must not expect from a Dissenter a faithful appreciation of the creed from which he dissents. You cannot be impartial on the religion of the place in which you live; you may believe it, or you may dis-

like it; it crosses your path in too many forms for you to be able to look at it with equanimity. Scott had rather a rigid form of Puritanism forced upon him in his infancy; it is asking too much to expect him to be partial to it. The aspect of religion which Scott delineates best is that which appears in griefs, especially in the grief of strong characters. His strong *natural* nature felt the power of death. He has given us many pictures of rude and simple men subdued, if only for a moment, into devotion by its presence.

On the whole, and speaking roughly, these defects in the delineation which Scott has given us of human life are but two. He omits to give us a delineation of the soul. We have mind, manners, animation, but it is the stir of this world. We miss the consecrating power; and we miss it not only in its own peculiar sphere, which, from the difficulty of introducing the deepest elements into a novel, would have been scarcely matter for a harsh criticism, but in the place in which a novelist might most be expected to delineate it. There are perhaps such things as the love-affairs of immortal beings, but no one would learn it from Scott. His heroes and heroines are well dressed for this world, but not for another; there is nothing even in their love which is suitable for immortality. As has been noticed, Scott also omits any delineation of the abstract side of unworldly intellect. This too might not have been so severe a reproach, considering its undramatic, unanimated nature, if it had stood alone; but taken in connection with the omission which we have just spoken of, it is most important. As the union of sense and romance makes the world of Scott so characteristically agreeable—a fascinating picture of this world in the light in which we like best to dwell on it; so the deficiency in the attenuated, striving intellect, as well as in the supernatural soul, gives to the "world" of Scott the cumbrousness and temporality—in short, the materialism—which is characteristic of the world.

We have dwelt so much on what we think are the characteristic features of Scott's imaginative representations that we have left ourselves no room to criticise the two most natural points of criticism in a novelist—plot and style. This

is not, however, so important in Scott's case as it would commonly be. He used to say: "It is of no use having a plot; you cannot keep to it". He modified and changed his thread of story from day to day,—sometimes even from book-selling reasons, and on the suggestion of others. An elaborate work of narrative art could not be produced in this way, every one will concede; the highest imagination, able to look far over the work, is necessary for that task. But the plots produced, so to say, by the pen of the writer as he passes over the events, are likely to have a freshness and a suitableness to those events, which is not possessed by the inferior writers who make up a mechanical plot before they commence. The procedure of the highest genius doubtless is scarcely a procedure: the view of the whole story comes at once upon its imagination like the delicate end and the distinct beginning of some long vista. But all minds do not possess the highest mode of conception; and among lower modes, it is doubtless better to possess the vigorous fancy which creates each separate scene in succession as it goes, than the pedantic intellect which designs everything long before it is wanted. There is a play in unconscious creation which no voluntary elaboration and preconceived fitting of distinct ideas can ever hope to produce. If the whole cannot be created by one bounding effort, it is better that each part should be created separately and in detail.

The style of Scott would deserve the highest praise if M. Thiers could establish his theory of narrative language. He maintains that a historian's language approaches perfection in proportion as it aptly communicates what is meant to be narrated without drawing any attention to itself. Scott's style fulfils this condition. Nobody rises from his works without a most vivid idea of what is related, and no one is able to quote a single phrase in which it has been narrated. We are inclined, however, to differ from the great French historian, and to oppose to him a theory derived from a very different writer. Coleridge used to maintain that all good poetry was untranslatable into words of the same language without injury to the sense: the meaning was, in his view, to be so inseparably intertwined even with the shades of the

language, that the change of a single expression would make a difference in the accompanying feeling, if not in the bare signification: consequently, all good poetry must be remembered exactly,—to change a word is to modify the essence. Rigidly this theory can only be applied to a few kinds of poetry, or special passages in which the imagination is exerting itself to the utmost, and collecting from the whole range of associated language the very expressions which it requires. The highest excitation of feeling is necessary to this peculiar felicity of choice. In calmer moments the mind has either a less choice, or less acuteness of selective power. Accordingly, in prose it would be absurd to expect any such nicety. Still, on great occasions in imaginative fiction, there should be passages in which the words seem to cleave to the matter. The excitement is as great as in poetry. The words should become part of the sense. They should attract our attention, as this is necessary to impress them on the memory; but they should not in so doing distract attention from the meaning conveyed. On the contrary, it is their inseparability from their meaning which gives them their charm and their power. In truth, Scott's language, like his sense, was such as became a bold, sagacious man of the world. He used the first sufficient words which came uppermost, and seems hardly to have been sensible, even in the works of others, of that exquisite accuracy and inexplicable appropriateness of which we have been speaking.

To analyse in detail the faults and merits of even a few of the greatest of the Waverley Novels would be impossible in the space at our command on the present occasion. We have only attempted a general account of a few main characteristics. Every critic must, however, regret to have to leave topics so tempting to remark upon as many of Scott's stories, and a yet greater number of his characters.

CHARLES DICKENS.[1]

(1858.)

IT must give Mr. Dickens much pleasure to look at the collected series of his writings. He has told us of the beginnings of *Pickwick*.

"I was," he relates in what is now the preface to that work, "a young man of three and twenty, when the present publishers, attracted by some pieces I was at that time writing in the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper (of which one series had lately been collected and published in two volumes, illustrated by my esteemed friend Mr. George Cruikshank), waited upon me to propose a something that should be published in shilling numbers—then only known to me, or I believe to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five and twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life. When I opened my door in Furnival's Inn to the managing partner who represented the firm, I recognised in him the person from whose hands I had bought, two or three years previously, and whom I had never seen before or since, my first copy of the magazine in which my first effusion—dropped stealthily one evening at twilight, with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street—appeared in all the glory of print; on which occasion, by-the-bye,—how well I recollect it!—I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there. I told my visitor of the coincidence, which we both hailed as a good omen; and so fell to business."

After such a beginning, there must be great enjoyment in looking at the long series of closely printed green volumes, in remembering their marvellous popularity, in knowing that they are a familiar literature wherever the English language is spoken,

[1] Cheap Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, etc. London, 1857-8. Chapman and Hall.

—that they are read with admiring appreciation by persons of the highest culture at the centre of civilisation,—that they amuse, and are fit to amuse, the roughest settler in Vancouver's Island.

The penetrating power of this remarkable genius among all classes at home is not inferior to its diffusive energy abroad. The phrase "household book" has, when applied to the works of Mr. Dickens, a peculiar propriety. There is no contemporary English writer, whose works are read so generally through the whole house, who can give pleasure to the servants as well as to the mistress, to the children as well as to the master. Mr. Thackeray without doubt exercises a more potent and plastic fascination within his sphere, but that sphere is limited. It is restricted to that part of the middle class which gazes inquisitively at the "Vanity Fair" world. The delicate touches of our great satirist have, for such readers, not only the charm of wit, but likewise the interest of valuable information; he tells them of the topics which they want to know. But below this class there is another and far larger, which is incapable of comprehending the idling world, or of appreciating the accuracy of delineations drawn from it,—which would not know the difference between a picture of Grosvenor Square by Mr. Thackeray and the picture of it in a Minerva-Press novel,—which only cares for or knows of its own multifarious, industrial, fig-selling world,—and over these also Mr. Dickens has power.

It cannot be amiss to take this opportunity of investigating, even slightly, the causes of so great a popularity. And if, in the course of our article, we may seem to be ready with over-refining criticism, or to be unduly captious with theoretical objections, we hope not to forget that so great and so diffused an influence is a *datum* for literary investigation,—that books which have been thus *tried* upon mankind and have thus succeeded, must be books of immense genius,—and that it is our duty as critics to explain, as far as we can, the nature and the limits of that genius, but never for one moment to deny or question its existence.

Men of genius may be divided into regular and irregular. Certain minds, the moment we think of them, suggest to us

the ideas of symmetry and proportion. Plato's name, for example, calls up at once the impression of something ordered, measured, and settled: it is the exact contrary of everything eccentric, immature, or undeveloped. The opinions of such a mind are often erroneous, and some of them may, from change of time, of intellectual *data*, or from chance, seem not to be quite worthy of it; but the mode in which those opinions are expressed, and (as far as we can make it out) the mode in which they are framed, affect us, as we have said, with a sensation of symmetricalness. It is not very easy to define exactly to what peculiar internal characteristic this external effect is due: the feeling is distinct, but the cause is obscure; it lies hid in the peculiar constitution of great minds, and we should not wonder that it is not very easy either to conceive or to describe. On the whole, however, the effect seems to be produced by a peculiar proportionateness, in each instance, of the mind to the tasks which it undertakes, amid which we see it, and by which we measure it. Thus we feel that the powers and tendencies of Plato's mind and nature were more fit than those of any other philosopher for the due consideration and exposition of the highest problems of philosophy, of the doubts and difficulties which concern man as man. His genius was adapted to its element; any change would mar the delicacy of the thought, or the polished accuracy of the expression. The weapon was fitted to its aim. Every instance of proportionateness does not, however, lead us to attribute this peculiar symmetry to the whole mind we are observing. The powers must not only be suited to the task undertaken, but the task itself must also be suited to a human being, and employ all the marvellous faculties with which he is endowed. The neat perfection of such a mind as Talleyrand's is the antithesis to the symmetry of genius; the niceties neither of diplomacy nor of conversation give scope to the entire powers of a great nature. We may lay down as the condition of a regular or symmetrical genius, that it should have the exact combination of powers suited to graceful and easy success in an exercise of mind great enough to task the whole intellectual nature.

On the other hand, men of irregular or unsymmetrical

genius are eminent either for some one or some few peculiarities of mind, have possibly special defects on other sides of their intellectual nature, at any rate want what the scientific men of the present day would call the *definite proportion* of faculties and qualities suited to the exact work they have in hand. The foundation of many criticisms of Shakespeare is, that he is deficient in this peculiar proportion. His overteeming imagination gives at times, and not unfrequently, a great feeling of irregularity; there seems to be confusion. We have the tall trees of the forest, the majestic creations of the highest genius; but we have, besides, a bushy second growth, an obtrusion of secondary images and fancies, which prevent our taking an exact measure of such grandeur. We have not the sensation of intense simplicity, which must probably accompany the highest conceivable greatness. Such is also the basis of Mr. Hallam's criticism on Shakespeare's language,[1] which Mr. Arnold has lately revived.[2] "His expression is often faulty," because his illustrative imagination, somewhat predominating over his other faculties, diffuses about the main expression a supplement of minor metaphors which sometimes distract the comprehension, and almost always deprive his style of the charm that arises from undeviating directness. Doubtless this is an instance of the very highest kind of irregular genius, in which all the powers exist in the mind in a very high, and almost all of them in the very highest measure, but in which from a slight excess in a single one, the charm of proportion is lessened. The most ordinary cases of irregular genius are those in which single faculties are abnormally developed, and call off the attention from all the rest of the mind by their prominence and activity. Literature, as the "fragment of fragments," is so full of the fragments of such minds that it is needless to specify instances.

Possibly it may be laid down that one of two elements is essential to a symmetrical mind. It is evident that such a mind must either apply itself to that which is theoretical or that which is practical, to the world of abstraction or to the

[1] *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, vol. ii., chap. vi.

[2] Preface to Matthew Arnold's *Poems*.

world of objects and realities. In the former case the deductive understanding, which masters first principles, and makes deductions from them, the thin ether of the intellect,—the "mind itself by itself,"—must evidently assume a great prominence. To attempt to comprehend principles without it, is to try to swim without arms, or to fly without wings. Accordingly, in the mind of Plato, and in others like him, the abstract and deducing understanding fills a great place; the imagination seems a kind of eye to descry its data; the artistic instinct an arranging impulse, which sets in order its inferences and conclusions. On the other hand, if a symmetrical mind busy itself with the active side of human life, with the world of concrete men and real things, its principal quality will be a practical sagacity, which forms with ease a distinct view and just appreciation of all the mingled objects that the world presents,—which allots to each its own place, and its intrinsic and appropriate rank. Possibly no mind gives such an idea of this sort of symmetry as Chaucer's. Everything in it seems in its place. A healthy sagacious man of the world has gone through the world; he loves it, and knows it; he dwells on it with fond appreciation; every object of the old life of "merry England" seems to fall into its precise niche in his ordered and symmetrical comprehension. The prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* is in itself a series of memorial tablets to mediæval society; each class has its tomb, and each its apt inscription. A man without such an apprehensive and broad sagacity must fail in every extensive delineation of various life; he might attempt to describe what he did not penetrate, or if by a rare discretion he avoided that mistake, his works would want the *binding element;* he would be deficient in that distinct sense of relation and combination which is necessary for the depiction of the whole of life, which gives to it unity at first, and imparts to it a mass in the memory ever afterwards. And eminence in one or other of these marking faculties—either in the deductive abstract intellect, or the practical seeing sagacity—seems essential to the mental constitution of a symmetrical genius, at least in man. There are, after all, but two principal all-important spheres in human life—thought and action; and

we can hardly conceive of a masculine mind symmetrically developed, which did not evince its symmetry by an evident perfection in one or other of those pursuits, which did not leave the trace of its distinct reflection upon the one, or of its large insight upon the other of them. Possibly it may be thought that in the sphere of pure art there may be room for a symmetrical development different from these; but it will perhaps be found, on examination of such cases, either that under peculiar and appropriate disguises one of these great qualities is present, or that the apparent symmetry is the narrow perfection of a limited nature, which may be most excellent in itself, as in the stricter form of sacred art, but which, as we explained, is quite opposed to that broad perfection of the thinking being, to which we have applied the name of the symmetry of genius.

If this classification of men of genius be admitted, there can be no hesitation in assigning to Mr. Dickens his place in it. His genius is essentially irregular and unsymmetrical. Hardly any English writer perhaps is much more so. His style is an example of it. It is descriptive, racy, and flowing; it is instinct with new imagery and singular illustration; but it does not indicate that due proportion of the faculties to one another which is a beauty in itself, and which cannot help diffusing beauty over every happy word and moulded clause. We may choose an illustration at random. The following graphic description will do:—

"If Lord George Gordon had appeared in the eyes of Mr. Willet, overnight, a nobleman of somewhat quaint and odd exterior, the impression was confirmed this morning, and increased a hundred-fold. Sitting bolt upright upon his bony steed, with his long, straight hair dangling about his face and fluttering in the wind; his limbs all angular and rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse's feet; a more grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived. In lieu of whip, he carried in his hand a great gold-headed cane, as large as any footman carries in these days; and his various modes of holding this unwieldy weapon—now upright before his face like the sabre of a horse-soldier, now over his shoulder like a musket, now between his finger and thumb, but always in some uncouth and awkward fashion—contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his appearance. Stiff, lank, and solemn, dressed in an unusual

manner, and ostentatiously exhibiting—whether by design or accident—all his peculiarities of carriage, gesture, and conduct, all the qualities, natural and artificial, in which he differed from other men, he might have moved the sternest looker-on to laughter, and fully provoked the smiles and whispered jests which greeted his departure from the Maypole Inn.

"Quite unconscious, however, of the effect he produced, he trotted on beside his secretary, talking to himself nearly all the way, until they came within a mile or two of London, when now and then some passenger went by who knew him by sight, and pointed him out to some one else, and perhaps stood looking after him, or cried in jest or earnest as it might be, 'Hurrah, Geordie! No Popery!' At which he would gravely pull off his hat and bow. When they reached the town and rode along the streets, these notices became more frequent; some laughed, some hissed, some turned their heads and smiled, some wondered who he was, some ran along the pavement by his side and cheered. When this happened in a crush of carts and chairs and coaches, he would make a dead stop, and pulling off his hat, cry, 'Gentlemen, No Popery!' to which the gentlemen would respond with lusty voices, and with three times three; and then on he would go again with a score or so of the raggedest following at his horse's heels, and shouting till their throats were parched.

"The old ladies too—there were a great many old ladies in the streets, and these all knew him. Some of them—not those of the highest rank, but such as sold fruit from baskets and carried burdens—clapped their shrivelled hands, and raised a weazen, piping, shrill 'Hurrah, my lord'. Others waved their hands or handkerchiefs, or shook their fans or parasols, or threw up windows, and called in haste to those within to come and see. All these marks of popular esteem he received with profound gravity and respect; bowing very low, and so frequently that his hat was more off his head than on; and looking up at the houses as he passed along, with the air of one who was making a public entry, and yet was not puffed-up or proud."[1]

No one would think of citing such a passage as this, as exemplifying the proportioned beauty of finished writing; it is not the writing of an evenly developed or of a highly cultured mind; it abounds in jolts and odd turns; it is full of singular twists and needless complexities: but, on the other hand, no one can deny its great and peculiar merit. It is an odd style, and it is very odd how much you read it. It is the overflow of a copious mind, though not the chastened expression of a harmonious one.

The same quality characterises the matter of his works.

[1] *Barnaby Rudge*, chap. xxxvii.

His range is very varied. He has attempted to describe every kind of scene in English life, from quite the lowest to almost the highest. He has not endeavoured to secure success by confining himself to a single path, nor wearied the public with repetitions of the subjects by the delineation of which he originally obtained fame. In his earlier works he never writes long without saying something well; something which no other man would have said; but even in them it is the characteristic of his power that it is apt to fail him at once; from masterly strength we pass without interval to almost infantine weakness,—something like disgust succeeds in a moment to an extreme admiration. Such is the natural fate of an unequal mind employing itself on a vast and variegated subject. In writing on the Waverley Novels, we ventured to make a division of novels into the ubiquitous—it would have been perhaps better to say the miscellaneous—and the sentimental: the first, as its name implies, busying itself with the whole of human life, the second restricting itself within a peculiar and limited theme. Mr. Dickens's novels are all of the former class. They aim to delineate nearly all that part of our national life which can be delineated,—at least, within the limits which social morality prescribes to social art; but you cannot read his delineation of any part without being struck with its singular incompleteness. An artist once said of the best work of another artist: "Yes, it is a pretty patch". If we might venture on the phrase, we should say that Mr. Dickens's pictures are graphic scraps; his best books are compilations of them.

The truth is, that Mr. Dickens wholly wants the two elements which we have spoken of, as one or other requisite for a symmetrical genius. He is utterly deficient in the faculty of reasoning. "Mamma, what shall I think about?" said the small girl. "My dear, don't think," was the old-fashioned reply. We do not allege that in the strict theory of education this was a correct reply; modern writers think otherwise; but we wish some one would say it to Mr. Dickens. He is often troubled with the idea that he must reflect, and his reflections are perhaps the worst reading in the world. There is a sen-

timental confusion about them; we never find the consecutive precision of mature theory, or the cold distinctness of clear thought. Vivid facts stand out in his imagination; and a fresh illustrative style brings them home to the imagination of his readers; but his continuous philosophy utterly fails in the attempt to harmonise them,—to educe a theory or elaborate a precept from them. Of his social thinking we shall have a few words to say in detail; his didactic humour is very unfortunate: no writer is less fitted for an excursion to the imperative mood. At present, we only say, what is so obvious as scarcely to need saying, that his abstract understanding is so far inferior to his picturesque imagination as to give even to his best works the sense of jar and incompleteness, and to deprive them altogether of the crystalline finish which is characteristic of the clear and cultured understanding.

Nor has Mr. Dickens the easy and various sagacity which, as has been said, gives a unity to all which it touches. He has, indeed, a quality which is near allied to it in appearance. His shrewdness in some things, especially in traits and small things, is wonderful. His works are full of acute remarks on petty doings, and well exemplify the telling power of minute circumstantiality. But the minor species of perceptive sharpness is so different from diffused sagacity, that the two scarcely ever are to be found in the same mind. There is nothing less like the great lawyer, acquainted with broad principles and applying them with distinct deduction, than the attorney's clerk who catches at small points like a dog biting at flies. "Over-sharpness" in the student is the most unpromising symptom of the logical jurist. You must not ask a horse in blinkers for a large view of a landscape. In the same way, a detective ingenuity in microscopic detail is of all mental qualities most unlike the broad sagacity by which the great painters of human affairs have unintentionally stamped the mark of unity on their productions. They show by their treatment of each case that they understand the whole of life; the special delineator of fragments and points shows that he understands them only. In one respect the defect is more striking in Mr. Dickens than in any other novelist of the

present day. The most remarkable deficiency in modern fiction is its omission of the business of life, of all those countless occupations, pursuits, and callings in which most men live and move, and by which they have their being. In most novels money *grows*. You have no idea of the toil, the patience, and the wearing anxiety by which men of action provide for the day, and lay up for the future, and support those that are given into their care. Mr. Dickens is not chargeable with this omission. He perpetually deals with the pecuniary part of life. Almost all his characters have determined occupations, of which he is apt to talk even at too much length. When he rises from the toiling to the luxurious classes, his genius in most cases deserts him. The delicate refinement and discriminating taste of the idling orders are not in his way; he knows the dry arches of London Bridge better than Belgravia. He excels in inventories of poor furniture, and is learned in pawnbrokers' tickets. But, although his creative power lives and works among the middle class and industrial section of English society, he has never painted the highest part of their daily intellectual life. He made, indeed, an attempt to paint specimens of the apt and able man of business in *Nicholas Nickleby;* but the Messrs. Cheeryble are among the stupidest of his characters. He forgot that breadth of platitude is rather different from breadth of sagacity. His delineations of middle-class life have in consequence a harshness and meanness which do not belong to that life in reality. He omits the relieving element. He describes the figs which are sold, but not the talent which sells figs well. And it is the same want of diffused sagacity in his own nature which has made his pictures of life so odd and disjointed, and which has deprived them of symmetry and unity.

The *bizarrerie* of Mr. Dickens's genius is rendered more remarkable by the inordinate measure of his special excellences. The first of these is his power of observation in detail. We have heard,—we do not know whether correctly or incorrectly,—that he can go down a crowded street, and tell you all that is in it, what each shop was, what the grocer's name was, how many scraps of orange-peel there were on the pavement. His

works give you exactly the same idea. The amount of detail which there is in them is something amazing,—to an ordinary writer something incredible. There are single pages containing telling *minutiæ*, which other people would have thought enough for a volume. Nor is his sensibility to external objects, though omnivorous, insensible to the artistic effect of each. There are scarcely anywhere such pictures of London as he draws. No writer has equally comprehended the artistic material which is given by its extent, its aggregation of different elements, its mouldiness, its brilliancy.

Nor does his genius—though, from some idiosyncrasy of mind or accident of external situation, it is more especially directed to city life—at all stop at the city wall. He is especially at home in the picturesque and obvious parts of country life, particularly in the comfortable and (so to say) mouldering portion of it. The following is an instance; if not the best that could be cited, still one of the best :—

"They arranged to proceed upon their journey next evening, as a stage-waggon, which travelled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the waggon came; and in due time it rolled away; with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

"What a soothing, luxurious, drowsy way of travelling, to lie inside that slowly-moving mountain, listening to the tinkling of the horses' bells, the occasional smacking of the carter's whip, the smooth rolling of the great broad wheels, the rattle of the harness, the cheery good-nights of passing travellers jogging past on little short-stepped horses—all made pleasantly indistinct by the thick awning, which seemed made for lazy listening under, till one fell asleep! The very going to sleep, still with an indistinct idea, as the head jogged to and fro upon the pillow, of moving onward with no trouble or fatigue, and hearing all these sounds like dreamy music, lulling to the senses—and the slow waking up, and finding one's self staring out through the breezy curtain half-opened in the front, far up into the cold bright sky with its countless stars, and downwards at the driver's lantern dancing on like its namesake Jack of the swamps and marshes, and sideways at the dark grim trees, and forward at the long bare road rising up, up, up, until it stopped abruptly at a sharp high ridge as if there were no more road, and all beyond was sky—and the stopping at the

inn to bait, and being helped out, and going into a room with fire and candles, and winking very much, and being agreeably reminded that the night was cold, and anxious for very comfort's sake to think it colder than it was! What a delicious journey was that journey in the waggon!

"Then the going on again—so fresh at first, and shortly afterwards so sleepy. The waking from a sound nap as the mail came dashing past like a highway comet, with gleaming lamps and rattling hoofs, and visions of a guard behind, standing up to keep his feet warm, and of a gentleman in a fur cap opening his eyes and looking wild and stupefied—the stopping at the turnpike, where the man has gone to bed, and knocking at the door until he answered with a smothered shout from under the bed-clothes in the little room above, where the faint light was burning, and presently came down, night-capped and shivering, to throw the gate wide open, and wish all waggons off the road except by day. The cold sharp interval between night and morning—the distant streak of light widening and spreading, and turning from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and from yellow to burning red—the presence of day, with all its cheerfulness and life—men and horses at the plough—birds in the trees and hedges, and boys in solitary fields frightening them away with rattles. The coming to a town—people busy in the market; light carts and chaises round the tavern yard; tradesmen standing at their doors; men running horses up and down the street for sale; pigs plunging and grunting in the dirty distance, getting off with long strings at their legs, running into clean chemists' shops and being dislodged with brooms by 'prentices; the night-coach changing horses—the passengers cheerless, cold, ugly, and discontented, with three months' growth of hair in one night—the coachman fresh as from a bandbox, and exquisitely beautiful by contrast:—so much bustle, so many things in motion, such a variety of incidents—when was there a journey with so many delights as that journey in the waggon!"[1]

Or, as a relief from a very painful series of accompanying characters, it is pleasant to read and remember the description of the fine morning on which Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit does not reflect. Mr. Dickens has, however, no feeling analogous to the nature-worship of some other recent writers. There is nothing Wordsworthian in his bent; the interpreting inspiration (as that school speak) is not his. Nor has he the erudition in difficult names which has filled some pages in late novelists with mineralogy and botany. His descriptions of Nature are fresh and superficial; they are not sermonic or scientific.

Nevertheless, it may be said that Mr. Dickens's genius is especially suited to the delineation of city life. London is

[1] *Old Curiosity Shop*, chap. xlvi.

ewspaper. Everything is there, and everything is dis-
ted. There is every kind of person in some houses;
ere is no more connection between the houses than
en the neighbours in the lists of "births, marriages, and
s". As we change from the broad leader to the squalid
e report, we pass a corner and we are in a changed world.
... is advantageous to Mr. Dickens's genius. His memory is full of instances of old buildings and curious people, and he does not care to piece them together. On the contrary, each scene, to his mind, is a separate scene,—each street a separate street. He has, too, the peculiar alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.

A second most wonderful special faculty which Mr. Dickens possesses is what we may call his *vivification* of character, or rather of characteristics. His marvellous power of observation has been exercised upon men and women even more than upon town or country; and the store of human detail, so to speak, in his books is endless and enormous. The boots at the inn, the pickpockets in the street, the undertaker, the Mrs. Gamp, are all of them at his disposal; he knows each trait and incident, and he invests them with a kind of perfection in detail which in reality they do not possess. He has a very peculiar power of taking hold of some particular traits, and making a character out of them. He is especially apt to incarnate particular professions in this way. Many of his people never speak without some allusion to their occupation. You cannot separate them from it. Nor does the writer ever separate them. What would Mr. Mould[1] be if not an undertaker? or Mrs. Gamp[2] if not a nurse? or Charley Bates[3] if not a pickpocket? Not only is human nature in them subdued to what it works in, but there seems to be no nature to subdue; the whole character is the idealisation of a trade, and is not in fancy or thought distinguishable from it. Accordingly, of necessity, such delineations become caricatures. We do not in general contrast them with reality; but as soon as we do, we are struck with the monstrous exaggerations which they present. You

[1] In *Martin Chuzzlewit.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] In *Oliver Twist.*

could no more fancy Sam Weller, or Mark Tapley, or the Artful Dodger[1] really existing, walking about among common ordinary men and women, than you can fancy a talking duck or a writing bear. They are utterly beyond the pale of ordinary social intercourse. We suspect, indeed, that Mr. Dickens does not conceive his characters to himself as mixing in the society he mixes in. He sees people in the street, doing certain things, talking in a certain way, and his fancy petrifies them in the act. He goes on fancying hundreds of reduplications of that act and that speech; he frames an existence in which there is nothing else but that aspect which attracted his attention. Sam Weller is an example. He is a man-servant, who makes a peculiar kind of jokes, and is wonderfully felicitous in certain similes. You see him at his first introduction:—

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman.

"'You're one o' the adwice gratis order,' thought Sam, 'or you wouldn't be so werry fond o' me all at once.' But he only said—'Well, sir?'

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman, with a conciliatory hem—'have you got many people stopping here, now? Pretty busy? Eh?'

"Sam stole a look at the inquirer. He was a little high-dried man, with a dark squeezed-up face, and small restless black eyes, that kept winking and twinkling on each side of his little inquisitive nose, as if they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature. He was dressed all in black, with boots as shiny as his eyes, a low white neckcloth, and a clean shirt with a frill to it. A gold watch-chain and seals depended from his fob. He carried his black kid gloves *in* his hands, not *on* them; and, as he spoke, thrust his wrists beneath his coat-tails, with the air of a man who was in the habit of propounding some regular posers.

"'Pretty busy, eh?' said the little man.

"'Oh, werry well, sir,' replied Sam, 'we shan't be bankrupts, and we shan't make our fort'ns. We eat our biled mutton without capers, and don't care for horse-radish wen ve can get beef.'

"'Ah,' said the little man, 'you're a wag, ain't you?'

"'My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint,' said Sam, 'it may be catching—I used to sleep with him.'

"'This is a curious old house of yours,' said the little man, looking round him.

"'If you'd sent word you was a-coming, we'd ha' had it repaired,' replied the imperturbable Sam.

"The little man seemed rather baffled by these several repulses, and

[1] In the *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *Oliver Twist*.

a short consultation took place between him and the two plump gentlemen. At its conclusion, the little man took a pinch of snuff from an oblong silver box, and was apparently on the point of renewing the conversation, when one of the plump gentlemen, who, in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles and a pair of black gaiters, interfered—

"'The fact of the matter is,' said the benevolent gentleman, 'that my friend here' (pointing to the other plump gentleman) 'will give you half a guinea, if you'll answer one or two——'

"'Now, my dear sir—my dear sir,' said the little man, 'pray allow me—my dear sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases is this: if you place a matter in the hands of a professional man, you must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr.' (he turned to the other plump gentleman, and said)—'I forget your friend's name.'

"'Pickwick,' said Mr. Wardle, for it was no other than that jolly personage.

"'Ah, Pickwick—really Mr. Pickwick, my dear sir, excuse me—I shall be happy to receive any private suggestions of yours, as *amicus curiæ*, but you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this case, with such an *ad captandum* argument as the offer of half a guinea. Really, my dear sir, really,' and the little man took an argumentative pinch of snuff, and looked very profound.

"'My only wish, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'was to bring this very unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.'

"'Quite right—quite right,' said the little man.

"'With which view,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'I made use of the argument which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed in any case.'

"'Ay, ay,' said the little man, 'very good, very good indeed; but you should have suggested it to *me*. My dear sir, I'm quite certain you cannot be ignorant of the extent of confidence which must be placed in professional men. If any authority can be necessary on such a point, my dear sir, let me refer you to the well-known case in Barnwell and——'

"'Never mind George Barnwell,' interrupted Sam, who had remained a wondering listener during this short colloquy; 'everybody knows vat sort of a case his was, tho' it's always been my opinion, mind you, that the young 'ooman deserved scragging a precious sight more than he did. Hows'ever, that's neither here nor there. You want me to except of half a guinea. Werry well, I'm agreeable: I can't say no fairer than that, can I, sir?' (Mr. Pickwick smiled.) 'Then the next question is, what the devil do you want with me? as the man said wen he see the ghost.'

"'We want to know——' said Mr. Wardle.

"'Now, my dear sir—my dear sir,' interposed the busy little man.

"Mr. Wardle shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"'We want to know,' said the little man solemnly; 'and we ask the question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside—we want to know who you've got in this house at present.'

"'Who there is in the house!' said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were always represented by that particular article of their costume which came under his immediate superintendence. 'There's a wooden leg in number six; there's a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there's two pair of halves in the commercial; there's these here painted tops in the snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.'

"'Nothing more?' said the little man.

"'Stop a bit,' replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. 'Yes; there's a pair of Wellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o' lady's shoes, in number five.'

"'What sort of shoes?' hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr. Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of visitors.

"'Country make,' replied Sam.

"'Any maker's name?'

"'Brown.'

"'Where of?'

"'Muggleton.'

"'It *is* them,' exclaimed Wardle. 'By Heavens, we've found them.'

"'Hush!' said Sam. 'The Wellingtons has gone to Doctors Commons.'

"'No,' said the little man.

"'Yes, for a license.'

"'We're in time,' exclaimed Wardle. 'Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost.'

"'Pray, my dear sir—pray,' said the little man; 'caution, caution.' He drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he drew out a sovereign.

"Sam grinned expressively.

"'Show us into the room at once, without announcing us,' said the little man, 'and it's yours.'"[1]

One can fancy Mr. Dickens hearing a dialogue of this sort, —not nearly so good, but something like it,—and immediately setting to work to make it better and put it in a book; then changing a little the situation, putting the boots one step up in the scale of service, engaging him as footman to a stout gentleman (but without for a moment losing sight of the peculiar kind of professional conversation and humour which his first dialogue presents), and astonishing all his readers by

[1] *Pickwick Papers*, chap. ix.

the marvellous fertility and magical humour with which he maintains that style. Sam Weller's father is even a stronger and simpler instance. He is simply nothing but an old coachman of the stout and extinct sort: you cannot separate him from the idea of that occupation. But how amusing he is! We dare not quote a single word of his talk; because we should go on quoting so long, and every one knows it so well. Some persons may think that this is not a very high species of delineative art. The idea of personifying traits and trades may seem to them poor and meagre. Anybody, they may fancy, can do that. But how would they do it? Whose fancy would not break down in a page—in five lines? Who can carry on the vivification with zest and energy and humour for volume after volume? Endless fertility in laughter-causing detail is Mr. Dickens's most astonishing peculiarity. It requires a continuous and careful reading of his works to be aware of his enormous wealth. Writers have attained the greatest reputation for wit and humour, whose whole works do not contain so much of either as are to be found in a very few pages of his.

Mr. Dickens's humour is indeed very much a result of the two peculiarities of which we have been speaking. His power of detailed observation and his power of idealising individual traits of character—sometimes of one or other of them, sometimes of both of them together. His similes on matters of external observation are so admirable that everybody appreciates them, and it would be absurd to quote specimens of them; nor is it the sort of excellence which best bears to be paraded for the purposes of critical example. Its off-hand air and natural connection with the adjacent circumstances are inherent parts of its peculiar merit. Every reader of Mr. Dickens's works knows well what we mean. And who is not a reader of them?

But his peculiar humour is even more indebted to his habit of vivifying external traits, than to his power of external observation. He, as we have explained, expands traits into people; and it is a source of true humour to place these, when so expanded, in circumstances in which only people—that is

complete human beings—can appropriately act. The humour of Mr. Pickwick's character is entirely of this kind. He is a kind of incarnation of simple-mindedness and what we may call obvious-mindedness. The conclusion which each occurrence or position in life most immediately presents to the unsophisticated mind is that which Mr. Pickwick is sure to accept. The proper accompaniments are given to him. He is a stout gentleman in easy circumstances, who is irritated into originality by no impulse from within, and by no stimulus from without. He is stated to have " retired from business ". But no one can fancy what he was in business. Such guileless simplicity of heart and easy impressibility of disposition would soon have induced a painful failure amid the harsh struggles and the tempting speculations of pecuniary life. As he is represented in the narrative, however, nobody dreams of such antecedents. Mr. Pickwick moves easily over all the surface of English life from Goswell Street to Dingley Dell, from Dingley Dell to the Ipswich elections, from drinking milk-punch in a wheelbarrow to sleeping in the approximate pound, and no one ever thinks of applying to him the ordinary maxims which we should apply to any common person in life, or to any common personage in a fiction. Nobody thinks it is wrong in Mr. Pickwick to drink too much milk-punch in a wheelbarrow, to introduce worthless people of whom he knows nothing to the families of people for whom he really cares; nobody holds him responsible for the consequences; nobody thinks there is anything wrong in his taking Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen to visit Mr. Winkle, senior, and thereby almost irretrievably offending him with his son's marriage. We do not reject moral remarks such as these, but they never occur to us. Indeed, the indistinct consciousness that such observations are possible, and that they are hovering about our minds, enhances the humour of the narrative. We are in a conventional world, where the mere maxims of common life do not apply, and yet which has all the amusing detail, and picturesque elements, and singular eccentricities of common life. Mr. Pickwick is a personified ideal; a kind of amateur in life, whose course we watch through all the circum-

stances of ordinary existence, and at whose follies we are amused just as really skilled people are at the mistakes of an amateur in their art. His being in the pound is not wrong; his being the victim of Messrs. Dodson is not foolish. "Always shout with the mob," said Mr. Pickwick. "But suppose there are two mobs," said Mr. Snodgrass. "Then shout with the loudest," said Mr. Pickwick. This is not in him weakness or time-serving, or want of principle, as in most even of ficititious people it would be. It is his way. Mr. Pickwick was expected to say something, so he said "Ah!" in a grave voice. This is not pompous as we might fancy, or clever as it might be, if intentionally devised; it is simply his way. Mr. Pickwick gets late at night over the wall behind the back-door of a young-ladies' school, is found in that sequestered place by the schoolmistress and the boarders and the cook, and there is a dialogue between them.[1] There is nothing out of possibility in this; it is his way. The humour essentially consists in treating as a moral agent a being who really is not a moral agent. We treat a vivified accident as a man, and we are surprised at the absurd results. We are reading about an acting thing, and we wonder at its scrapes, and laugh at them as if they were those of the man. There is something of this humour in every sort of farce. Everybody knows these are not real beings acting in real life, though they talk as if they were, and want us to believe that they are. Here, as in Mr. Dickens's books, we have exaggerations pretending to comport themselves as ordinary beings, caricatures acting as if they were characters.

At the same time it is essential to remember, that however great may be and is the charm of such exaggerated personifications, the best specimens of them are immensely less excellent, belong to an altogether lower range of intellectual achievements, than the real depiction of actual living men. It is amusing to read of beings *out* of the laws of morality, but it is more profoundly interesting, as well as more instructive, to read of those whose life in its moral conditions resembles our own. We see this most distinctly when both representations are given by the

[1] Chap. xvi.

genius of one and the same writer. Falstaff is a sort of sack-holding paunch, an exaggerated over-development which no one thinks of holding down to the commonplace rules of the ten commandments and the statute-law. We do not think of them in connection with him. They belong to a world apart. Accordingly, we are vexed when the king discards him and reproves him. Such a fate was a necessary adherence on Shakespeare's part to the historical tradition; he never probably thought of departing from it, nor would his audience have perhaps endured his doing so. But to those who look at the historical plays as pure works of imaginative art, it seems certainly an artistic misconception to have developed so marvellous an *un*moral impersonation, and then to have subjected it to an ethical and punitive judgment. Still, notwithstanding this error, which was very likely inevitable, Falstaff is probably the most remarkable specimen of caricature-representation to be found in literature. And its very excellence of execution only shows how inferior is the kind of art which creates only such representations. Who could compare the genius, marvellous as must be its fertility, which was needful to create a Falstaff, with that shown in the higher productions of the same mind in Hamlet, Ophelia, and Lear? We feel instantaneously the difference between the aggregating accident which rakes up from the externalities of life other accidents analogous to itself, and the central ideal of a real character which cannot show itself wholly in any accidents, but which exemplifies itself partially in many, which unfolds itself gradually in wide spheres of action, and yet, as with those we know best in life, leaves something hardly to be understood, and after years of familiarity is a problem and a difficulty to the last. In the same way, the embodied characteristics and grotesque exaggerations of Mr. Dickens, notwithstanding all their humour and all their marvellous abundance, can never be for a moment compared with the great works of the real painters of essential human nature.

There is one class of Mr. Dickens's pictures which may seem to form an exception to this criticism. It is the delineation of the outlaw, we might say the anti-law, world in *Oliver*

Twist. In one or two instances Mr. Dickens has been so fortunate as to hit on characteristics which, by his system of idealisation and continual repetition, might really be brought to look like a character. A man's trade or profession in regular life can only exhaust a very small portion of his nature; no approach is made to the essence of humanity by the exaggeration of the traits which typify a beadle or an undertaker. With the outlaw world it is somewhat different. The bare fact of a man belonging to the world is so important to his nature, that if it is artistically developed with coherent accessories, some approximation to a distinctly natural character will be almost inevitably made. In the characters of Bill Sykes and Nancy this is so. The former is the skulking ruffian who may be seen any day at the police-courts, and whom any one may fancy he sees by walking through St. Giles's. You cannot attempt to figure to your imagination the existence of such a person without being thrown into the region of the passions, the will, and the conscience; the mere fact of his maintaining, as a condition of life and by settled profession, a struggle with regular society, necessarily brings these deep parts of his nature into prominence; great crime usually proceeds from abnormal impulses or strange effort. Accordingly, Mr. Sykes is the character most approaching to a coherent man who is to be found in Mr. Dickens's works. We do not say that even here there is not some undue heightening admixture of caricature,—but this defect is scarcely thought of amid the general coherence of the picture, the painful subject, and the wonderful command of strange accessories. Miss Nancy is a still more delicate artistic effort. She is an idealisation of the girl who may also be seen at the police-courts and St. Giles's; as bad, according to occupation and common character, as a woman can be, yet retaining a tinge of womanhood, and a certain compassion for interesting suffering, which under favouring circumstances might be the germ of a regenerating influence. We need not stay to prove how much the imaginative development of such a personage must concern itself with our deeper humanity; how strongly, if excellent, it must be contrasted with everything conventional or casual or

superficial. Mr. Dickens's delineation is in the highest degree excellent. It possesses not only the more obvious merits belonging to the subject, but also that of a singular delicacy of expression and idea. Nobody fancies for a moment that they are reading about anything beyond the pale of ordinary propriety. We read the account of the life which Miss Nancy leads with Bill Sykes without such an idea occurring to us: yet when we reflect upon it, few things in literary painting are more wonderful than the depiction of a professional life of sin and sorrow, so as not even to startle those to whom the deeper forms of either are but names and shadows. Other writers would have given as vivid a picture: Defoe would have poured out even a more copious measure of telling circumstantiality, but he would have narrated his story with an inhuman distinctness, which if not impure is *un*pure; French writers, whom we need not name, would have enhanced the interest of their narrative by trading on the excitement of stimulating scenes. It would be injustice to Mr. Dickens to say that he has surmounted these temptations; the unconscious evidence of innumerable details proves that, from a certain delicacy of imagination and purity of spirit, he has not even experienced them. Criticism is the more bound to dwell at length on the merits of these delineations, because no artistic merit can make *Oliver Twist* a pleasing work. The squalid detail of crime and misery oppresses us too much. If it is to be read at all, it should be read in the first hardness of the youthful imagination, which no touch can move too deeply, and which is never stirred with tremulous suffering at the "still sad music of humanity".[1] The coldest critic in later life may never hope to have again the apathy of his boyhood.

It perhaps follows from what has been said of the characteristics of Mr. Dickens's genius, that it would be little skilled in planning plots for his novels. He certainly is not so skilled. He says in his preface to the *Pickwick Papers* "that they were designed for the introduction of diverting characters and incidents; that no ingenuity of plot was attempted, or even at that time considered feasible by the author in connection

[1] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey".

with the desultory plan of publication adopted;" and he adds an expression of regret that "these chapters had not been strung together on a thread of more general interest". It is extremely fortunate that no such attempt was made. In the cases in which Mr. Dickens has attempted to make a long connected story, or to develop into scenes or incidents a plan in any degree elaborate, the result has been a complete failure. A certain consistency of genius seems necessary for the construction of a consecutive plot. An irregular mind naturally shows itself in incoherency of incident and aberration of character. The method in which Mr. Dickens's mind works, if we are correct in our criticism upon it, tends naturally to these blemishes. Caricatures are necessarily isolated; they are produced by the exaggeration of certain conspicuous traits and features; each being is enlarged on its greatest side; and we laugh at the grotesque grouping and the startling contrast. But that connection between human beings on which a plot depends is rather severed than elucidated by the enhancement of their diversities. Interesting stories are founded on the intimate relations of men and women. These intimate relations are based not on their superficial traits, or common occupations, or most visible externalities, but on the inner life of heart and feeling. You simply divert attention from that secret life by enhancing the perceptible diversities of common human nature, and the strange anomalies into which it may be distorted. The original germ of *Pickwick* was a "Club of Oddities". The idea was professedly abandoned; but traces of it are to be found in all Mr. Dickens's books. It illustrates the professed grotesqueness of the characters as well as their slender connection.

The defect of plot is heightened by Mr. Dickens's great, we might say complete, inability to make a love-story. A pair of lovers is by custom a necessity of narrative fiction, and writers who possess a great general range of mundane knowledge, and but little knowledge of the special sentimental subject, are often in amusing difficulties. The watchful reader observes the transition from the hearty description of well-known scenes, of prosaic streets, or journeys by wood and

river, to the pale colours of ill-attempted poetry, to such sights as the novelist evidently wishes that he need not try to see. But few writers exhibit the difficulty in so aggravated a form as Mr. Dickens. Most men by taking thought can make a lay figure to look not so very unlike a young gentleman, and can compose a telling schedule of ladylike charms. Mr. Dickens has no power of doing either. The heroic character—we do not mean the form of character so called in life and action, but that which is hereditary in the heroes of novels—is not suited to his style of art. Hazlitt wrote an essay to inquire "Why the heroes of romances are insipid"; and without going that length it may safely be said that the character of the agreeable young gentleman who loves and is loved should not be of the most marked sort. Flirtation ought not to be an exaggerated pursuit. Young ladies and their admirers should not express themselves in the heightened and imaginative phraseology suited to Charley Bates and the Dodger. Humour is of no use, for no one makes love in jokes: a tinge of insidious satire may perhaps be permitted as a rare and occasional relief, but it will not be thought "a pretty book," if so malicious an element be at all habitually perceptible. The broad farce in which Mr. Dickens indulges is thoroughly out of place. If you caricature a pair of lovers ever so little, by the necessity of their calling you make them ridiculous. One of Sheridan's best comedies[1] is remarkable for having no scene in which the hero and heroine are on the stage together; and Mr. Moore suggests[2] that the shrewd wit distrusted his skill in the light, dropping love-talk which would have been necessary. Mr. Dickens would have done well to imitate so astute a policy; but he has none of the managing shrewdness which those who look at Sheridan's career attentively will probably think not the least remarkable feature in his singular character. Mr. Dickens, on the contrary, pours out painful sentiments as if he wished the abundance should make up for the inferior quality. The excruciating writing which is expended on Miss Ruth Pinch[3] passes belief. Mr. Dickens is not only unable to make

[1] "School for Scandal".
[2] *Life of Sheridan*, vol. i., chap. v.
[3] In *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

lovers talk, but to describe heroines in mere narrative. As has been said, most men can make a jumble of blue eyes and fair hair and pearly teeth, that does very well for a young lady, at least for a good while; but Mr. Dickens will not, probably cannot, attain even to this humble measure of descriptive art. He vitiates the repose by broad humour, or disenchants the delicacy by an unctuous admiration.

This deficiency is probably nearly connected with one of Mr. Dickens's most remarkable excellences. No one can read Mr. Thackeray's writings without feeling that he is perpetually treading as close as he dare to the border-line that separates the world which may be described in books from the world which it is prohibited so to describe. No one knows better than this accomplished artist where that line is, and how curious are its windings and turns. The charge against him is that he knows it but too well; that with an anxious care and a wistful eye he is ever approximating to its edge, and hinting with subtle art how thoroughly he is familiar with, and how interesting he could make, the interdicted region on the other side. He never violates a single conventional rule; but at the same time the shadow of the immorality that is not seen is scarcely ever wanting to his delineation of the society that is seen. Every one may perceive what is passing in his fancy. Mr. Dickens is chargeable with no such defect: he does not seem to feel the temptation. By what we may fairly call an instinctive purity of genius, he not only observes the conventional rules, but makes excursions into topics which no other novelist could safely handle, and, by a felicitous instinct, deprives them of all impropriety. No other writer could have managed the humour of Mrs. Gamp without becoming unendurable. At the same time it is difficult not to believe that this singular insensibility to the temptations to which many of the greatest novelists have succumbed is in some measure connected with his utter inaptitude for delineating the portion of life to which their art is specially inclined. He delineates neither the love-affairs which ought to be, nor those which ought not to be.

Mr. Dickens's indisposition to "make capital" out of the

most commonly tempting part of human sentiment is the more remarkable because he certainly does not show the same indisposition in other cases. He has naturally great powers of pathos; his imagination is familiar with the common sort of human suffering; and his marvellous conversancy with the detail of existence enables him to describe sick-beds and death-beds with an excellence very rarely seen in literature. A nature far more sympathetic than that of most authors has familiarised him with such subjects. In general, a certain apathy is characteristic of book-writers, and dulls the efficacy of their pathos. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this defect; but, on the other hand, is exceedingly prone to a very ostentatious exhibition of the opposite excellence. He dwells on dismal scenes with a kind of fawning fondness; and he seems unwilling to leave them, long after his readers have had more than enough of them. He describes Mr. Dennis the hangman [1] as having a professional fondness for his occupation: he has the same sort of fondness apparently for the profession of death-painter. The painful details he accumulates are a very serious drawback from the agreeableness of his writings. Dismal "light literature" is the dismallest of reading. The reality of the police reports is sufficiently bad, but a fictitious police report would be the most disagreeable of conceivable compositions. Some portions of Mr. Dickens's books are liable to a good many of the same objections. They are squalid from noisome trivialities, and horrid with terrifying crime. In his earlier books this is commonly relieved at frequent intervals by a graphic and original mirth. As, we will not say age, but maturity, has passed over his powers, this counteractive element has been lessened; the humour is not so happy as it was, but the wonderful fertility in painful *minutiæ* still remains.

Mr. Dickens's political opinions have subjected him to a good deal of criticism, and to some ridicule. He has shown, on many occasions, the desire—which we see so frequent among able and influential men—to start as a political reformer. Mr. Spurgeon said, with an application to himself: "If you've

[1] In *Barnaby Rudge.*

got the ear of the public, *of course* you must begin to tell it its faults". Mr. Dickens has been quite disposed to make this use of his popular influence. Even in *Pickwick* there are many traces of this tendency; and the way in which it shows itself in that book and in others is very characteristic of the time at which they appeared. The most instructive political characteristic of the years 1825 to 1845 is the growth and influence of the scheme of opinion which we call Radicalism. There are several species of creeds which are comprehended under this generic name, but they all evince a marked reaction against the worship of the English constitution and the affection for the English *status quo*, which were then the established creed and sentiment. All Radicals are Anti-Eldonites. This is equally true of the Benthamite or philosophical radicalism of the early period, and the Manchester, or "definite-grievance radicalism," among the last vestiges of which we are now living. Mr. Dickens represents a species different from either. His is what we may call the "sentimental radicalism"; and if we recur to the history of the time, we shall find that there would not originally have been any opprobrium attaching to such a name. The whole course of the legislation, and still more of the administration, of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century was marked by a harsh unfeelingness which is of all faults the most contrary to any with which we are chargeable now. The world of the "Six Acts,"[1] of the frequent executions, of the Draconic criminal law, is so far removed from us that we cannot comprehend its having ever existed. It is more easy to understand the recoil which has followed. All the social speculation, and much of the social action of the few years succeeding the Reform Bill, bear the most marked traces of the reaction. The spirit which animates Mr. Dickens's political reasonings and observations expresses it exactly. The vice of the then existing social authorities, and of the then existing public, had been the forgetfulness of

[1] Of 23rd November, 3rd December, and 17th December, 1819; introduced by Eldon, Sidmouth and Castlereagh, to put down sedition, just after the Manchester massacre and the Cato Street conspiracy. (Forrest Morgan.)

the pain which their own acts evidently produced,—an unrealising habit which adhered to official rules and established maxims, and which would not be shocked by the evident consequences, by proximate human suffering. The sure result of this habit was the excitement of the habit precisely opposed to it. Mr. Carlyle, in his *Chartism*, we think, observes of the poor-law reform: "It was then, above all things, necessary that outdoor relief should cease. But how? What means did great Nature take for accomplishing that most desirable end? She created a race of men who believed the cessation of outdoor relief to be the one thing needful." In the same way, and by the same propensity to exaggerated opposition which is inherent in human nature, the unfeeling obtuseness of the early part of this century was to be corrected by an extreme, perhaps an excessive, sensibility to human suffering in the years which have followed. There was most adequate reason for the sentiment in its origin, and it had a great task to perform in ameliorating harsh customs and repealing dreadful penalties; but it has continued to repine at such evils long after they ceased to exist, and when the only facts that at all resemble them are the necessary painfulness of due punishment and the necessary rigidity of established law. Mr. Dickens is an example both of the proper use and of the abuse of the sentiment. His earlier works have many excellent descriptions of the abuses which had descended to the present generation from others whose sympathy with pain was less tender. Nothing can be better than the description of the poor debtors' gaol in *Pickwick*, or of the old parochial authorities in *Oliver Twist*. No doubt these descriptions are caricatures, all his delineations are so; but the beneficial use of such art can hardly be better exemplified. Human nature endures the aggravation of vices and foibles in written description better than that of excellences. We cannot bear to hear even the hero of a book for ever called "just"; we detest the recurring praise even of beauty, much more of virtue. The moment you begin to exaggerate a character of true excellence, you spoil it; the traits are too delicate not to be injured by heightening, or marred by over-emphasis. But a beadle is made for

caricature. The slight measure of pomposity that humanises his unfeelingness introduces the requisite comic element; even the turnkeys of a debtors' prison may by skilful hands be similarly used. The contrast between the destitute condition of Job Trotter and Mr. Jingle and their former swindling triumph is made comic by a rarer touch of unconscious art. Mr. Pickwick's warm heart takes so eager an interest in the misery of his old enemies, that our colder nature is tempted to smile. We endure the over-intensity, at any rate the unnecessary aggravation, of the surrounding misery; and we endure it willingly, because it brings out better than anything else could have done the half-comic intensity of a sympathetic nature.

It is painful to pass from these happy instances of well-used power to the glaring abuses of the same faculty in Mr. Dickens's later books. He began by describing really removable evils in a style which would induce all persons, however insensible, to remove them if they could; he has ended by describing the natural evils and inevitable pains of the present state of being, in such a manner as must tend to excite discontent and repining. The result is aggravated, because Mr. Dickens never ceases to hint that these evils are removable, though he does not say by what means. Nothing is easier than to show the evils of anything. Mr. Dickens has not unfrequently spoken, and, what is worse, he has taught a great number of parrot-like imitators to speak, in what really is, if they knew it, a tone of objection to the necessary constitution of human society. If you will only write a description of it, any form of government will seem ridiculous. What is more absurd than a despotism, even at its best? A king of ability or an able minister sits in an orderly room filled with memorials, and returns, and documents, and memoranda. These are his world; among these he of necessity lives and moves. Yet how little of the real life of the nation he governs can be represented in an official form! How much of real suffering is there that statistics can never tell! how much of obvious good is there that no memorandum to a minister will ever mention! how much deception is there in what such documents contain! how monstrous must be the ignorance of

the closet statesman, after all his life of labour, of much that a ploughman could tell him of! A free government is almost worse, as it must read in a written delineation. Instead of the real attention of a laborious and anxious statesman, we have now the shifting caprices of a popular assembly—elected for one object, deciding on another; changing with the turn of debate; shifting in its very composition; one set of men coming down to vote to-day, to-morrow another and often unlike set, most of them eager for the dinner-hour, actuated by unseen influences, by a respect for their constituents, by the dread of an attorney in a far-off borough. What people are these to control a nation's destinies, and wield the power of an empire, and regulate the happiness of millions! Either way we are at fault. Free government seems an absurdity, and despotism is so too. Again, every form of law has a distinct expression, a rigid procedure, customary rules and forms. It is administered by human beings liable to mistake, confusion, and forgetfulness, and in the long run, and on the average, is sure to be tainted with vice and fraud. Nothing can be easier than to make a case, as we may say, against any particular system, by pointing out with emphatic caricature its inevitable miscarriages, and by pointing out nothing else. Those who so address us may assume a tone of philanthropy, and for ever exult that they are not so unfeeling as other men are; but the real tendency of their exhortations is to make men dissatisfied with their inevitable condition, and, what is worse, to make them fancy that its irremediable evils can be remedied, and indulge in a succession of vague strivings and restless changes. Such, however—though in a style of expression somewhat different—is very much the tone with which Mr. Dickens and his followers have in later years made us familiar. To the second-hand repeaters of a cry so feeble, we can have nothing to say; if silly people cry because they think the world is silly, let them cry; but the founder of the school cannot, we are persuaded, peruse without mirth the lachrymose eloquence which his disciples have perpetrated. The soft moisture of irrelevant sentiment cannot have entirely entered into his soul. A truthful genius must have forbidden

it. Let us hope that his pernicious example may incite some one of equal genius to preach with equal efficiency a sterner and a wiser gospel; but there is no need just now for us to preach it without genius.

There has been much controversy about Mr. Dickens's taste. A great many cultivated people will scarcely concede that he has any taste at all; a still larger number of fervent admirers point, on the other hand, to a hundred felicitous descriptions and delineations which abound in apt expressions and skilful turns and happy images,—in which it would be impossible to alter a single word without altering for the worse; and naturally inquire whether such excellences in what is written do not indicate good taste in the writer. The truth is, that Mr. Dickens has what we may call creative taste; that is to say, the habit or faculty, whichever we may choose to call it, which at the critical instant of artistic production offers to the mind the right word, and the right word only. If he is engaged on a good subject for caricature, there will be no defect of taste to preclude the caricature from being excellent. But it is only in moments of imaginative production that he has any taste at all. His works nowhere indicate that he possesses in any degree the passive taste which decides what is good in the writings of other people, and what is not, and which performs the same critical duty upon a writer's own efforts when the confusing mists of productive imagination have passed away. Nor has Mr. Dickens the gentlemanly instinct which in many minds supplies the place of purely critical discernment, and which, by constant association with those who know what is best, acquires a second-hand perception of that which is best. He has no tendency to conventionalism for good or for evil; his merits are far removed from the ordinary path of writers, and it was not probably so much effort to him as to other men to step so far out of that path: he scarcely knew how far it was. For the same reason, he cannot tell how faulty his writing will often be thought, for he cannot tell what people will think.

A few pedantic critics have regretted that Mr. Dickens had not received what they call a regular education. And if we

understand their meaning, we believe they mean to regret that he had not received a course of discipline which would probably have impaired his powers. A regular education should mean that ordinary system of regulation and instruction which experience has shown to fit men best for the ordinary pursuits of life. It applies the requisite discipline to each faculty in the exact proportion in which that faculty is wanted in the pursuits of life; it develops understanding, and memory, and imagination, each in accordance with the scale prescribed. To men of ordinary faculties this is nearly essential; it is the only mode in which they can be fitted for the inevitable competition of existence. To men of regular and symmetrical genius also, such a training will often be beneficial. The world knows pretty well what are the great tasks of the human mind, and has learned in the course of ages with some accuracy what is the kind of culture likely to promote their exact performance. A man of abilities extraordinary in degree but harmonious in proportion will be the better for having submitted to the kind of discipline which has been ascertained to fit a man for the work to which powers in that proportion are best fitted; he will do what he has to do better and more gracefully; culture will add a touch to the finish of nature. But the case is very different with men of irregular and anomalous genius, whose excellences consist in the aggravation of some special faculty, or at the most one or two. The discipline which will fit such a man for the production of great literary works is that which will most develop the peculiar powers in which he excels; the rest of the mind will be far less important; it will not be likely that the culture which is adapted to promote this special development will also be that which is most fitted for expanding the powers of common men in common directions. The precise problem is to develop the powers of a strange man in a strange direction. In the case of Mr. Dickens, it would have been absurd to have shut up his observant youth within the walls of a college. They would have taught him nothing about Mrs. Gamp there; Sam Weller took no degree. The kind of early life fitted to develop the power of apprehensive observation is a brooding

life in stirring scenes; the idler in the streets of life knows the streets; the bystander knows the picturesque effect of life better than the player; and the meditative idler amid the hum of existence is much more likely to know its sound and to take in and comprehend its depths and meanings than the scholastic student intent on books, which, if they represent any world, represent one which has long passed away,—which commonly try rather to develop the reasoning understanding than the seeing observation,—which are written in languages that have long been dead. You will not train by such discipline a caricaturist of obvious manners.

Perhaps, too, a regular instruction and daily experience of the searching ridicule of critical associates would have detracted from the pluck which Mr. Dickens shows in all his writings. It requires a great deal of courage to be a humorous writer; you are always afraid that people will laugh at you instead of with you: undoubtedly there is a certain eccentricity about it. You take up the esteemed writers, Thucydides and the *Saturday Review;* after all, they do not make you laugh. It is not the function of really artistic productions to contribute to the mirth of human beings. All sensible men are afraid of it, and it is only with an extreme effort that a printed joke attains to the perusal of the public: the chances are many to one that the anxious producer loses heart in the correction of the press, and that the world never laughs at all. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this weakness. He has what a Frenchman might call the courage of his faculty. The real daring which is shown in the *Pickwick Papers*, in the whole character of Mr. Weller senior, as well as in that of his son, is immense, far surpassing any which has been shown by any other contemporary writer. The brooding irregular mind is in its first stage prone to this sort of courage. It perhaps knows that its ideas are "out of the way"; but with the infantine simplicity of youth, it supposes that originality is an advantage. Persons more familiar with the ridicule of their equals in station (and this is to most men the great instructress of the college time) well know that of all qualities this one most requires to be clipped and pared and measured. Posterity,

we doubt not, will be entirely perfect in every conceivable element of judgment; but the existing generation like what they have heard before—it is much easier. It required great courage in Mr. Dickens to write what his genius has compelled them to appreciate.

We have throughout spoken of Mr. Dickens as he was, rather than as he is; or, to use a less discourteous phrase, and we hope a truer, of his early works rather than of those which are more recent. We could not do otherwise consistently with the true code of criticism. A man of great genius, who has written great and enduring works, must be judged mainly by them; and not by the inferior productions which, from the necessities of personal position, a fatal facility of composition, or other cause, he may pour forth at moments less favourable to his powers. Those who are called on to review these inferior productions themselves, must speak of them in the terms they may deserve; but those who have the more pleasant task of estimating as a whole the genius of the writer, may confine their attention almost wholly to those happier efforts which illustrate that genius. We should not like to have to speak in detail of Mr. Dickens's later works, and we have not done so. There are, indeed, peculiar reasons why a genius constituted as his is (at least if we are correct in the view which we have taken of it) would not endure without injury during a long life the applause of the many, the temptations of composition, and the general excitement of existence. Even in his earlier works it was impossible not to fancy that there was a weakness of fibre unfavourable to the longevity of excellence. This was the effect of his deficiency in those masculine faculties of which we have said so much,—the reasoning understanding and firm far-seeing sagacity. It is these two component elements which stiffen the mind, and give a consistency to the creed and a coherence to its effects,—which enable it to protect itself from the rush of circumstances. If to a deficiency in these we add an extreme sensibility to circumstances,—a mobility, as Lord Byron used to call it, of emotion, which is easily impressed, and still more easily carried away by impression,—we have the idea of a character peculiarly unfitted to bear the flux of time and

chance. A man of very great determination could hardly bear up against them with such slight aids from within and with such peculiar sensibility to temptation. A man of merely ordinary determination would succumb to it; and Mr. Dickens has succumbed. His position was certainly unfavourable. He has told us that the works of his later years, inferior as all good critics have deemed them, have yet been more read than those of his earlier and healthier years. The most characteristic part of his audience, the lower middle-class, were ready to receive with delight the least favourable productions of genius. Human nature cannot endure this; it is too much to have to endure a coincident temptation both from within and from without. Mr. Dickens was too much inclined by natural disposition to lachrymose eloquence and exaggerated caricature. Such was the kind of writing which he wrote most easily. He found likewise that such was the kind of writing that was read most readily; and of course he wrote that kind. Who would have done otherwise? No critic is entitled to speak very harshly of such degeneracy, if he is not sure that he could have coped with difficulties so peculiar. If that rule is to be observed, who is there that will not be silent? No other Englishman has attained such a hold on the vast populace; it is little, therefore, to say that no other has surmounted its attendant temptations.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.[1]

(1859.)

WE shall not be expected to discuss in a party spirit the subject of parliamentary reform. It has never been objected to the *National Review* that it is a party organ; and even periodicals which have long been such, scarcely now discuss that subject in a party spirit. Both Whigs and Conservatives are pledged to do something, and neither as a party have agreed what they would do. We would attempt to give an impartial criticism of the electoral system which now exists, and some indication of the mode in which we think that its defects should be amended. It is possible, we fear, that our article may be long, and that our criticism on existing arrangements may appear tedious. But a preliminary understanding is requisite; unless we are agreed as to what is to be desired, we cannot hope to agree as to what is to be done: a clear knowledge of the disease must precede the remedy. In business, no ingenuity of detail can compensate for indistinctness of design.

There is much that may be said against the Reform Act of 1832; but, on the whole, it has been successful. It is a commonplace to speak of the legislative improvements of the last twenty-five years, and it would be tedious to enumerate them. Free trade, a new colonial policy, the improved poor-

[1] "On the Electoral Statistics of the Counties and Boroughs in England and Wales during the Twenty-five Years from the Reform Act of 1832 to the Present Time." By William Newmarch, one of the Honorary Secretaries of the Statistical Society. Read before the Statistical Society, 16th June, 1857, and printed in the *Journal* of that Society, vol. xx., parts 2 and 3. We cannot speak too highly of these most admirable statistics. No pains have been spared to make them complete, and extreme judgment has been shown in the selection. When it is not otherwise stated, all our electoral statistics are from this source.

law, the Encumbered Estate Act in Ireland, the tithe commutation, municipal reform, the tentative but most judicious support of education, are only some of the results of the reform of the House of Commons. Scarcely less important is the improvement which the Reform Bill has introduced into the general tone of our administration; our executive has become purer, more considerate, and more humane, and it would be difficult to show that in its ordinary and beneficial action it is much weaker. Nor is this all. So much of agreement in opinion as we see around us is perhaps unexampled in a political age; and it is the more singular, because the English nation is now considerably less homogeneous in its social structure than it once was. The prodigious growth of manufactures and trade has created a new world in the North of England, which contrasts with the south in social circumstances and social habits: yet at no former time was there such a difference as there now is between Lancashire and Devonshire. It is impossible not to ascribe this agreement to the habit of national discussion which the Reform Act has fostered. The scattered argument, the imperfect but perpetual influence of the press and society, have made us, perhaps even to an excessive degree, unanimous. Possibly we are all too much disposed to catch the voice which is in the air. Still, a little too much concord is better than a little too much discord. It is a striking result, that our present constitution has educed from such dissimilar elements so much of harmony.

Beneficial, however, as are these incidental results of the Reform Bill, they are not the most important parts of its success. This measure has, to a considerable extent, been successful in its *design*. The object which its framers had in view was, to transfer the predominant influence in the State from certain special classes to the general aggregate of fairly instructed men. It is not perhaps very easy to prove upon paper that this has been, at least in a very great degree, effected. The most difficult thing to establish by argument is an evident fact of observation. There are no statistics of opinion to which we can refer, there is no numerical comparison which will establish the accordance of parliamentary with social opinion.

We must trust to our eyes and ears, to the vague but conclusive evidence of events. If, indeed, public opinion had always been as unanimous as it now is, we should have some difficulty in ascertaining the fact. When everybody thinks the same, there is no saying which is the stronger party. But during the last twenty-six years there have been many periods at which public opinion was much divided and strongly excited. The great legislative changes which have been mentioned were not effected without long and animated party dissension. The policy of a great country like this has continually required the determination of critical questions, both at home and abroad; its ramified affairs have been a never-failing source of controverted topics. What would have been the sign if the expressed opinion of Parliament had been contrary to the distinct opinion of the country? In the present state of the country we should not have been long in learning it. We should have had political meetings, not of one class but all classes, clouds of petitions from every quarter, endless articles in newspapers; the cry would only have died away when the obnoxious decision was reversed, and the judgment of Parliament submitted itself to the will of the nation. The inclination of the House of Commons is evidently not to oppose the country. On the contrary, we all know the power, the undue power, possessed by that part of the press whose course is supposed to indicate what is likely to be the common opinion. So far from our legislators dissenting too often from the expressed judgment of the country, they are but too much swayed by indications of what it probably will be. The history of our great legislative changes of itself shows that the opinion of Parliament is, in the main, coincident with that of the nation. Parliament and the country were converted at the same time. Even the history of the corn-law agitation, which is often referred to as indicating the contrary, proves this conspicuously. It succeeded almost at the moment that impartial people, who had no interests on either side, were convinced that it ought to succeed. Mr. Cobden liked to relate, that when he first began to dream of agitating the question, a most experienced nobleman observed to him, "Repeal the corn laws! you will repeal

the monarchy as soon". The noble lord was right in estimating the tenacity and intensity of the protectionist creed; but he did not know, and Mr. Cobden did, the power of plain argument on the common mass of plain men, and the certainty that *their* opinion, if really changed, would suffice to change the course of our legislation, even in opposition to strong aristocratic influence and very rooted prejudice. It has been said that Sir Robert Peel owed his success in life to "being converted at the conversion of the average man"; the same influences acted on his mind that acted on the minds of most other people throughout the nation, and in much the same measure. He was, therefore, converted to new views at the same time that most other people were converted to them. The same may be said of the present Parliament. Nobody would call the reformed House of Commons original; it is never in advance of the higher order of cultivated thought: but every one would agree that it is pre-eminently considerate, well-judging, and convincible; and when people say this, they mean that its opinions commonly coincide with their own.

In no respect is the reality of the accordance in opinion between Parliament and the nation so convincingly shown as in the sympathy of Parliament with the eccentricities of public opinion. We are constantly acknowledging that "the English mind" is exclusively occupied with single questions; sometimes with one, and sometimes with another, but at each time with one only. If Parliament did not share the same influences as the general body of fairly educated men, there would every now and then be a remarkable contrast between the subjects which interested Parliament and that which occupied the nation. The intensity of our peculiar sympathies make this more likely. Satirists say that the English nation is liable to intellectual *seizures;* and so exclusive and so restless is our intellectual absorption, so sudden its coming, so quick sometimes is its cessation, that there is some significance in the phrase. We are struck with particular ideas, and for the time think of nothing else. It will be found that Parliament, if it be sitting, thinks of the same. No instance of this can be more remarkable than the parliamentary pro-

ceedings on Mr. Roebuck's motion for an inquiry into the conduct of the Crimean campaign. There was great excitement in the nation at the moment; it has enabled the present generation to understand what historians did not before understand—the fate of poor Admiral Byng. The English nation cannot bear failure in war. If there had been any one to hang at the time Mr. Roebuck made his motion, and he could have been hanged directly, certainly he would have been hanged. On the other hand, the authority of statesmanlike opinion in Parliament, the weight of political connection, the legitimate disinclination to break up a Government during a dangerous crisis, and—what is more remarkable—the great preponderance of sound argument, were united to influence Parliament not to grant even an inquiry. The result showed that the opinion of our leading statesmen was right, and that the arguments they produced were incontrovertible. Few investigations that have been commenced with so much outcry have ever had so trivial an effect. Yet, in opposition to all these influences, usually so omnipotent,—in opposition to the combined force of personal feeling and abstract argument,—the House of Commons so far accurately represented the sentiment of the country as to grant, and even to insist on granting, the inquiry. This Parliamentary episode appears to be an *instantia lucifera* on the subject; it shows that, even when we could wish it otherwise, the House of Commons will echo the voice of the nation.

After all, there can be no more conclusive evidence of the substantial agreement between Parliament and the nation than the slight interest which is taken by the public in all questions of organic reform. Every one knows how the Reform Act of 1832 was carried; no one doubted that the public mind was excited then; no fair person could doubt what the decision of the nation then was. The "insurrection of the middle classes," as it has been called, insured the success of the "Bill". It was alleged by its most reasonable opponents "that the measure could not be final; that those on whom it was proposed to confer the franchise would, even after the passing of the measure, be but small in comparison with those

from whom it would be still withheld; that in a few years a similar agitation would recur, and a similar necessity of yielding to agitation; that the storm of 1832 would be a feeble prelude to that of 1842," etc. These prophecies were not without a species of probability, but they have not been realised. No excited multitude clamours for enfranchisement; the reality is the reverse of the anticipation.

Two defects, however, may be discerned in the general accordance of Parliamentary with national opinion. The Parliament certainly has an undue bias towards the sentiments and views of the landed interest. It is not easy to trace this in immediate results. We have said that we scarcely think that it is proved by the history of the free-trade agitation; that agitation was successful, nearly if not quite, as soon as it should have been. We may, indeed, speculate on the results which might have occurred if the Irish famine had not happened, and if Sir R. Peel had not formed a statesmanlike judgment upon its consequences; we may believe that there would in that case have been an opposition between an educated nation converted by reasoning to the principles of free trade, and a majority in Parliament wedded by prejudice and interest to protection. Still, as this is but conjecture, we cannot cite it as conclusive evidence. Nor is the partiality to real property in matters of taxation which is occasionally dwelt on, very easy to prove in figures. The account is at best a complicated one. The exemption of land from probate duty is partly compensated by the succession duty, by the land-tax, by the more severe pressure of the income-tax, and still more by the necessary incidence of much local taxation on this kind of property. Still, a fair observer, closely comparing the opinion of the House of Commons with that of the public out of doors, will certainly observe some signs of a partiality towards the landed interest among our legislators. We cannot ascribe this to any obvious preponderance in number of the county over the borough seats. Taking population as a test, it is otherwise. There are in England and Wales 159 county members, more than double that number (viz. 335) of borough members; the population of the repre-

sented boroughs is 7,500,000, that of the counties 10,500,000, consequently the represented boroughs have not as many inhabitants as the counties, though they elect twice the number of members. This test is, of course, a most imperfect one; but may serve to show that in mere arithmetic the counties are not extravagantly favoured. The real cause is the peculiar structure of our county society. A county member is almost of necessity one of the county gentry; he must not only possess land, but it must be land in that place: no one else is "entitled to stand". On the other hand, boroughs return a very miscellaneous class of members. Many important landowners sit for them. So great is the variety, that no class is excluded from them altogether. This contrast must affect the distribution of parliamentary power. The county members form a peculiar class in the House of Commons, and exercise a steady influence there out of proportion to their mere numbers. Besides, so much more of social influence belongs to the territorial aristocracy than to any other class, that its weight is indefinitely increased. Not a few men enter Parliament mainly to augment their social importance, and over these the unquestioned possessors of social rank necessarily have great power. A third circumstance contributes its effect. The Ministers of the Crown are generally large landowners. By imperious social usage, they must be men of large property; and all opulence gravitates towards the land. Political opulence does so particularly. Until recently there was much difficulty in finding other investments not requiring sedulous personal attention, and not liable to be affected by political vicissitudes. It is of essential importance that Ministers of State should be persons *at ease* in their worldly circumstances, and it is quite out of the question that they should have any share in the administration of commercial enterprises; they have enough to do without that. Their wealth, too, should not be in a form that could expose them even to the suspicion of stock-jobbing, or of making an improper use of political information. We have now many kinds of property debentures, canal shares, railway shares, etc., which have these advantages in nearly an equal degree with land itself; but

the growth of these is recent. It may hereafter have important consequences, but it has not as yet had time to achieve them. Accordingly the series of Cabinet Ministers presents a nearly unbroken rank of persons who either are themselves large landowners, or are connected closely by birth or intermarriage with large landowners. This combination of circumstances gives to real property an influence in our political system greater than in strict theory we should wish it to have. It is true that the owners of much land are men of much leisure, and the possession of such property has a sedative influence, which in moderation may not be undesirable; but the effective representation of national opinion requires the selection of members of Parliament from men of various occupations, various tendencies, and various sympathies. Public opinion in a composite nation is formed by the action and reaction of many kinds of minds; and abstractedly it seems a defect that the solid mass of county members, on whatever side of the house they sit, should present features so marked and uniform.

The second defect in the accordance of Parliamentary with national opinion is but another phase of the same fact. Too little weight is at present given to the growing parts of the country, too much to the stationary. It appears that the county constituencies in England and Wales have only increased, in the twenty years between 1837 and 1857, from 473,000 to 505,000, that is, at about 6 per cent.; the borough constituencies, in the same period, have increased from 321,000 to 439,000, or at the rate of 17 per cent. And it further appears, as we should expect, that the principal increase, both in the case of counties and boroughs, is not in the purely agricultural districts, but in the great scenes of manufacturing industry and in the metropolis. The growth of constituencies, according to the present franchise, is a much better test of relative importance than the mere growth of population; it indicates the increase of property, and therefore of presumable intelligence. These figures plainly indicate, if not an existing defect, yet a source of future defect in our representative system. If there was a just proportion between the two halves

of England in 1832, there is not that just proportion now. In the long run, public opinion will be much more influenced by the growing portion of the country than by the stationary. It is an indistinct perception of this fact that stimulates whatever agitation for reform at present exists. The manufacturers of Leeds and Manchester do not give levees and entertainments to Mr. Bright from any attraction towards abstract democracy; the rate-paying franchise which Mr. Bright desires would place these classes under the irresistible control of their work-people. What our great traders really desire is, their own due weight in the community. They feel that the country squire and the proprietor of a petty borough have an influence in the nation above that which they ought to have, and greater than their own. A system arranged a quarter of a century ago presses with irritating constraint on those who have improved with half-magical rapidity during that quarter of a century,—is unduly favourable to those who have improved much less or not at all.

Subject, however, to these two exceptions, the House of Commons of the present day coincides nearly—or sufficiently nearly—in habitual judgment with the fairly intelligent and reasonably educated part of the community. Almost all persons, except the avowed holders of the democratic theory, would think that this is enough. Most people wish to see embodied in Parliament the *true judgment* of the nation; they wish to see an elected legislature fairly representing—that is, coinciding in opinion with—the thinking part of the community. What more, they would inquire, is wanted? We answer, that though this is by much the most important requisite of a good popular legislature, it is not absolutely the only one.

At present, the most important function of the representative part of our legislature—the House of Commons—is the *ruling* function. By a very well-known progress of events, the popular part of our constitution has grown out of very small beginnings to a practical sovereignty over all the other parts. To possess the confidence of the House of Commons is all that a Minister desires; the power of the Crown is

reduced to a kind of social influence; that of the House of Lords is contracted to a suspensive veto. For the exercise of this ruling function, the substantial conformity of the judgment and opinion of the House of Commons with that of the fairly cultivated and fairly influential part of the people at large is the most important of possible conditions—is, in fact, the one condition on which the satisfactory performance of that function appears to depend. No legislature destitute of this qualification, whatever its other merits may be, can create that feeling of diffused satisfaction which is the peculiar happiness of constitutional countries, or can ensure that distinct comprehension of a popular policy which is the greatest source of their strength. Nothing can satisfy which is not comprehended: no policy can be popular which is not understood. This is a truth of every-day observation. We are, nowadays, so familiar with the beneficial results of the ruling action of Parliament, that we are engrossed by it; we fancy that it is the sole duty of a representative assembly: yet so far is this from being the case, that in England it was not even the original one.

The earliest function of a House of Commons was undeniably what we may call an *expressive* function. In its origin it was (matters of taxation excepted) a petitioning body; all the early statutes, as is well known, are in this form: the Petition of Right is an instance of its adoption in times comparatively recent. The function of the popular part of the legislature was then to represent to the king the *wants* of his faithful Commons. They were called to express the feelings of those who sent them and their own. Of course, in its original form, this function is obsolete; and if something analogous to it were not a needful element in the duties of every representative assembly, it would be childish to refer to it. But in every free country it is of the utmost importance—and, in the long run, a pressing necessity—that all opinions extensively entertained, all sentiments widely diffused should be *stated* publicly before the nation. We may attribute the real decision of questions, the actual adoption of policies, to the ordinary and fair intelligence of the community, or to the

legislature which represents it. But we must also take care to bring before that fair intelligence and that legislature the sentiments, the interests, the opinions, the prejudices, the wants, of all classes of the nation; we must be sure that no decision is come to in ignorance of real facts and intimate wants. The diffused multitude of moderate men, whose opinions, taken in the aggregate, form public opinion, are just as likely to be tyrannical towards what they do not realise, inapprehensive of what is not argued out, thoughtless of what is not brought before them, as any other class can be. They will judge well of what they are made to understand; they will not be harsh to feelings that are brought home to their imagination; but the materials of a judgment must be given them, the necessary elements of imagination must be provided, otherwise the result is certain. A free government is the most stubbornly stupid of all governments to whatever is *unheard* by its deciding classes. On this account it is of the utmost importance that there should be in the House of Commons some persons able to speak, and authorised to speak, the wants, sentiments, and opinions of every section of the community—delegates, one might almost say, of that section. It is only by argument in the legislature that the legislature can be impressed; it is by argument in the legislature that the attention of the nation is most easily attracted and most effectually retained.

If, with the light of this principle, we examine our present system of representation, it seems unquestionable that it is defective. We do not provide any mode of expression for the sentiments of what are vaguely but intelligibly called the working classes. We ignore them. The Reform Act of 1832 assumed that it was expedient to give a representation to the wants and feelings of those who live in ten-pound houses, but that it was not expedient to give any such expression to the wants and feelings of those who live in houses rated below that sum. If we were called to consider that part of this subject, we should find much to excuse the framers of that Act in the state of opinion which then prevailed and the general circumstances of the time. It was necessary to propose a simple measure; and this numerical demarcation has a trenchant

simplicity. But if we now considerately review our electoral organisation, we must concede that, however perfectly it may provide an appropriate regulator for our national affairs, it omits to provide a befitting organ of *expression* for the desires and convictions of these particular classes.

The peculiar characteristics of a portion of the working classes render this omission of special importance. The agricultural labourers may have no sentiments on public affairs; but the artisan classes have. Not only are their circumstances peculiar, and their interests sometimes different from those of the high orders of the community—both which circumstances are likely to make them adopt special opinions, and are therefore grounds for a special representation—but the habit of mind which their pursuits and position engender is of itself not unlikely to cause some eccentricity of judgment. Observers tell us that those who live by manual ingenuity are more likely to be remarkable for originality than for modesty. In the present age—and to some extent, we must expect, in every age—such persons must be self-taught; and self-taught men are commonly characterised by a one-sided energy and something of a self-sufficient disposition. The *sensation* of perfection in a mechanical employment is of itself not without an influence tending towards conceit; and however instructed in definite learning energetic men in these classes may become, they are not subjected to the insensible influences of cultivated life, they do not live in the temperate zone of society, which soon chills the fervid ideas of unseasonable originality. Being cooped up within the narrow circle of ideas that their own energy has provided, they are particularly liable to singular opinions. This is especially the case on politics. They are attracted to that subject in a free country of necessity; their active intellects are in search of topics for reflection; and this subject abounds in the very atmosphere of our national life, is diffused in newspapers, obtruded at elections, to be heard at every corner of the street. Energetic minds in this class are therefore particularly likely to entertain eccentric opinions on political topics; and it is peculiarly necessary that such opinions should, by some adequate machinery, be stated and made

public. If such singular views be brought into daily collision with ascertained facts and the ordinary belief of cultivated men, their worth can be tested, the weakness of their fallacious part exposed, any new grain of truth they may contain appreciated. On some subjects (possibly, for example, on simple questions of foreign policy) the views of self-taught men may be very valuable, for their moral instincts sometimes have a freshness rarely to be found. At any rate, whatever may be the abstract value of the special sentiments and convictions of the operative classes, their very speciality is a strong indication that our constitution is defective in providing no distinct outlet for their expression.

A theorist might likewise be inclined to argue that the Reform Act of 1832 was defective in not providing an appropriate organ for the expression of opinion of the higher orders of society. It selects a ten-pound householder for special favour. In large towns, nay to a certain extent in any town, the more cultivated and refined classes, who live in better houses than these, are practically disfranchised; the number of their inferiors renders valueless the suffrage conferred on them. We remember some years ago hearing a conversation between a foreigner and a most accomplished Englishman, who lived in Russell Square. The foreigner was expatiating on the happiness of English people in being governed by a legislature in which they were represented. The Russell-Square scholar replied, "*I* am represented by Mr. Wakley and Tom Duncombe". He felt the scorn natural to a cultivated man in a metropolitan constituency at the supposition that such representatives as these really expressed *his* views and sentiments. We know how constantly in America, which is something like a nation of metropolitan constituencies, the taste and temper of the electors excludes the more accomplished and leisured classes from the legislature, and how vulgar a stamp the taste and temper of those elected impresses on the proceedings of its legislature and the conduct of its administration. Men of refinement shrink from the House of Representatives as from a parish vestry. In England, though we feel this in some measure, we feel it much less. Other parts of our electoral

system now afford a refuge to that refined cultivation which is hateful to and hates the grosser opinion of the small shopkeepers in cities. Our higher classes still desire to rule the nation; and so long as this is the case, the inherent tendencies of human nature secure them the advantage. Manner and bearing have an influence on the poor; the nameless charm of refinement tells; personal confidence is almost everywhere more easily accorded to one of the higher classes than to one of the lower classes. From this circumstance, there is an inherent tendency in any electoral system which does not vulgarise the government, to protect the rich and to represent the rich. Though by the letter of the law, a man who lives in a house assessed at £10 has an equal influence on the constitution of the legislature with a man whose house is assessed at £100, yet, in truth, the richer man has the security that the members of Parliament, and especially the foremost members of Parliament, are much more likely to be taken from this class than from a poorer class.

We may therefore conclude that there is not any ground for altering the electoral system established by the Reform Act of 1832 on account of its not providing for the due representation of the more cultivated classes. Indirectly it does so. But we must narrowly watch any changes in that system which are proposed to us, with the view of seeing whether their operation might not have a tendency to impair the subtle working of this indirect machinery. We must bear in mind that the practical disfranchisement of the best classes is the ascertained result of giving an equal weight to high and low in constituencies like the metropolitan.

These considerations do not affect our previous conclusion as to the lower orders. We ascertained that, however perfectly the House of Commons under the present system of election may coincide in judgment with the fairly educated classes of the country, and however competent it may on that account be to perform the ruling function of a popular legislature, it was nevertheless defective in its provision for the performance of the *expressive* functions of such a legislature; because it provided no organ for informing Parliament and the country of

the sentiments and opinions of the working, and especially of the artisan classes.

Another deficiency in the system of representation now existing is of a different nature. It is not only desirable that a popular legislature should be fitted to the discharge of its duties, but also that it should be elected by a process which occasions no unnecessary moral evils. A theorist would be inclined to advance a step further. He would require that a popular assembly should be elected in the mode which would diffuse the instruction given by the habitual possession of the franchise among the greatest number of competent persons, and which would deny it to the greatest number of unfit persons. But every reasonable theorist would hasten to add, that the end must never be sacrificed to the means. The mode of election which is selected must be one which will bring together an assembly of members fitted to discharge the functions of Parliament. *Among* those modes of election, this theoretical principle prescribes the rule of choice; but we must not, under its guidance, attempt to travel beyond the circle of those modes. A practical statesman will be very cautious how he destroys a machinery which attains its essential object, for the sake of an incidental benefit which might be expected from a different machinery. If we have a good legislature, he will say, let us not endanger its goodness for the sake of a possible diffusion of popular education. All sensible men would require that the advocates of such a measure should show beyond all reasonable doubt that the extension of the suffrage, which they recommend on this secondary ground, should not impair the attainment of the primary end for which *all* suffrage was devised. At the present moment, there certainly are many persons of substantial property and good education who do not possess the franchise, and to whom it would be desirable to give it, if they could be distinguished from others who are not so competent. A man of the highest education, who does not reside in a borough, may have large property in the funds, in railway shares, or any similar investment; but he will have no vote unless his house is rated above £50. But, as we have said, we must not, from a theoretical desire to include such persons in our list of electors,

run a risk of admitting also any large number of persons who would be unfit to vote, and thereby impairing the practical utility of Parliament. No such hesitation should, however, hold us back when peculiar moral evils can be proved to arise from a particular mode of election. If that be so, we ought on the instant to make the most anxious search for some other mode of election not liable to the same objection: we ought to run some risk; if another mode of election can be suggested, apparently equal in efficiency, which would not produce the same evils, we should adopt it at once in place of the other. We must act on the spirit of faith that what is morally wrong cannot be politically right.

This objection applies in the strongest manner to one portion of our electoral system, namely, the smaller borough constituencies. We there entrust the franchise to a class of persons few enough to be bought, and not respectable enough to refuse to be bought. The disgraceful exposures of some of these boroughs before election committees make it probable that the same abuses exist in others: doubtless, too, we do not know the worst. The worst constituencies are slow to petition, because the local agents of both parties are aware of what would come to light, and fear the consequent penalties. Enough, however, is in evidence for us to act upon. Some of these small boroughs are dependent on some great nobleman or man of fortune; and this state is perhaps preferable to their preserving a vicious independence: but even this state is liable to very many objections. It is most advantageous that the nominal electors should be the real electors. Legal fictions have a place in courts of law; it is sometimes better or more possible to strain venerable maxims beyond their natural meaning than to limit them by special enactment: but legal fictions are very dangerous in the midst of popular institutions and a genuine moral excitement. We speak day by day of "shams"; and the name will be for ever applied to modes of election which pretend to entrust the exclusive choice to those who are known by everybody never to choose. The Reform Act of 1832 was distinctly founded on the principle that all modes of election should be *real*.

We arrive, therefore, at the result that the system of 1832 is defective, because it established, or rather permitted to continue, moral evils which it is our duty to remove, if by possibility they can be removed. However, in that removal we must be careful to watch exactly what we are doing. It has been shown that the letter of the Reform Act makes no provision for the special representation of wealth and cultivation; the representation which they have is attained by *indirect* means. The purchasable boroughs are undoubtedly favourable to wealth; the hereditary boroughs to men of hereditary cultivation; and we should be careful not to impair unnecessarily the influence of these elements by any alteration we may resolve upon.

We can now decide on the result which we should try to attain in a new Reform Bill. If we could obtain a House of Commons that should be well elected, that should contain true and adequate exponents of all class interests, that should coincide in opinion with the fair intelligence of the country, we shall have all which we ought to desire. We have satisfied ourselves that we do not possess all these advantages now; we have seen that a part of our system of election is grossly defective; that our House of Commons contains no adequate exponents of the views of the working classes; that though its judgment has, as yet, fairly coincided with public opinion, yet that its constitution gives a dangerous preponderance to the landed interest, and is likely to fail us hereafter unless an additional influence be given to the more growing and energetic classes of society.

We should think it more agreeable (and perhaps it would be so to most of our readers) if we were able at once to proceed to discuss the practical plan by which these objects might be effected; but in deference to a party which has some zealous adherents, and to principles which, in an indistinct shape, are widely diffused, we must devote a few remarks to the consideration of the ultra-democratic theory; and as we have to do so, it will be convenient to discuss in connection with it one or two of the schemes which the opponents of that theory have proposed for testing political intelligence.

As is well known, the democratic theory requires that Parliamentary representation should be proportioned to mere numbers. This is not, indeed, the proposition which is at this moment put forward. The most important section of democratic reformers now advocate a ratepaying or household franchise; but this is either avowedly as a step to something further, or because from considerations of convenience it is considered better to give the franchise only to those whose residences can be identified. But it is easy to show that the ratepaying franchise is almost equally liable with the manhood suffrage to a most important objection. That objection, of course, is that the adoption of the scheme would give entire superiority to the lower part of the community. Nothing is easier than to show that a ratepaying franchise would have that effect. In England and Wales—

The number of houses assessed at £10 and above is computed to be	. . . . .	990,000
„ „	at £6 and under £10	572,000
„ „	under £6 . . .	1,713,000
		3,275,000

More than half the persons who would be admitted by the ratepaying franchise are, therefore, of a very low order, living in houses under £6 rent, and two-thirds are below £10, the lowest qualification admitted by the present law. It therefore seems quite certain that the effect of the proposed innovation must be very favourable to ignorance and poverty, and very unfavourable to cultivation and intelligence.

There used to be much argument in favour of the democratic theory, on the ground of its supposed conformity with the abstract rights of man. This has passed away; but we cannot say that the reasons by which it has been replaced are more distinct: we think that they are less distinct. We can understand that an enthusiast should maintain, on fancied grounds of immutable morality, or from an imaginary conformity with a supernatural decree, that the ignorant should govern the instructed; but we do not comprehend how any one can maintain the proposition on grounds of expediency. We might believe that it was right to submit to the results of

such a polity; but those results, it would seem, must be beyond controversy pernicious. The arguments from expediency, which are supposed to establish the proposition, are never set forth very clearly; and we do not think them worth confuting. We are, indeed, disposed to believe, in spite of much direct assertion to the contrary, that the democratic theory still rests not so much on reason as on a kind of sentiment—on an obscure conception of abstract rights. The animation of its advocates is an indication of it. They think they are contending for the "rights" of the people; and they endeavour to induce the people to believe so too. We hold this opinion the more strongly, because we believe that there *is* such a thing, after all, as abstract right in political organisations. We find it impossible to believe that all the struggles of men for liberty —all the enthusiasm it has called forth, all the passionate emotions it has caused in the very highest minds, all the glow of thought and rustle of obscure feeling which the very name excites in the whole mass of men—have their origin in calculations of advantage and a belief that such and such arrangements would be beneficial. The masses of men are very difficult to excite on bare grounds of self-interest; most easy if a bold orator tells them confidently they are *wronged*. The foundation of government upon simple utility is but the fiction of philosophers; it has never been acceptable to the natural feelings of mankind. There is far greater truth in the formula of the French writers that "*le droit dérive de la capacité*". Some sort of feeling akin to this lurks, we believe, in the minds of our reformers; they think they can show that some classes now unenfranchised are as capable of properly exercising the franchise as some who have possessed it formerly, or some who have it now. The £5 householder of to-day is, they tell us, in education and standing but what the £10 householder was in 1832. The opponents of the theory are pressed with the argument, that every fit person should have the franchise, and that many who are excluded are as fit as some who exercise it, and from whom no one proposes to take it away.

The answer to the argument is plain. Fitness to govern—for that is the real meaning of exercising the franchise which

elects a *ruling* assembly—is not an absolute quality of any individual. That fitness is relative and comparative; it must depend on the community to be governed, and on the merits of other persons who may be capable of governing that community. A savage chief may be capable of governing a savage tribe; he may have the right of governing it, for he may be the sole person capable of so doing; but he would have no right to govern England. We must look likewise to the competitors for the sovereignty. Whatever may be your capacity for rule, you have no right to obtain the opportunity of exercising it by dethroning a person who is *more* capable. You are wronging the community if you do: for you are depriving it of a better government than that which you can give to it. You are wronging also the ruler you supersede; for you are depriving him of the appropriate exercise of his faculties. Two wrongs are thus committed from a fancied idea that abstract capacity gives a right to rule irrespective of comparative relations. The true principle is, that every person has a right to *so much political power as he can exercise without impeding any other person who would more fitly exercise such power.* If we apply this to the lower orders of society, we see the reason why, notwithstanding their numbers, they must always be subject—always at least be comparatively uninfluential. Whatever their capacity may be, it must be less than that of the higher classes, whose occupations are more instructive and whose education is more prolonged. Any such measure for enfranchising the lower orders as would overpower, and consequently disfranchise, the higher, should be resisted on the ground of "abstract right"; you are proposing to take power from those who have the superior capacity, and to vest it in those who have but an inferior capacity, or, in many cases, no capacity at all. If we probe the subject to the bottom, we shall find that justice is on the side of a graduated rule, in which all persons should have an influence proportioned to their political capacity; and it is at this graduation that the true maxims of representative government really aim. They wish that the fairly intelligent persons, who create public opinion, as we call it, in society, should rule in the State, which is the authorised means of car-

rying that opinion into action. This is the body which has the greater right to rule; this is the *felt intelligence* of the nation, "*la légitime aristocratie, celle qu'acceptent librement les masses, sur qui elle doit exercer son pouvoir*".[1]

It is impossible to deny that this authority, in matters of political opinion, belongs by right, and is felt to belong in fact, to the higher orders of society rather than to the lower. The advantages of leisure, of education, of more instructive pursuits, of more instructive society, must and do produce an effect. A writer of very democratic leanings has observed, that "there is an unconquerable, and, to a certain extent, beneficial proneness in man to rely on the judgment and authority of those who are elevated above himself in rank and riches, from the irresistible associations of the human mind; a feeling of respect and deference is entertained for a superior in station which enhances and exalts all his good qualities, gives more grace to his thoughts, more wisdom to his opinions, more weight to his judgment, more excellence to his virtues. . . . Hence the elevated men of society will always maintain an ascendency which, without any direct exertion of influence, will affect the result of popular elections; and when to this are added the capabilities which they possess, or ought to possess, from their superior intelligence, of impressing their own opinions on other classes it will be evident that if any sort of control were justifiable, it would be superfluous for any good purpose."[2] There are individual exceptions; but in questions of this magnitude we must speak broadly: and we may say that political intelligence will in general exist rather in the educated classes than in the less educated, rather in the rich than the poor; and not only that it will exist, but that it will, in the absence of misleading feelings, be *felt* by both parties to exist.

We have quoted the above passage for more reasons than one. It not only gives an appropriate description of the popular association of superiority in judgment with superiority

[1] M. Guizot, *Essai sur les Origines du Gouvernement représentatif.*

[2] Bailey on Representative Government; quoted in Sir G. Lewis's "Essay on the Influence of Authority on Matters of Opinion," p. 228.

in station, but it draws from the fact of that association an inference which would be very important if it were correct. It says, in substance, that as the higher orders are felt by the lower to be more capable of governing, they will be chosen by the lower, if the latter are left free to choose; that, therefore, no matter how democratic the government—in fact, the more democratic the government, the surer are the upper orders to lead. But experience shows that this is an error. If the acquisition of power is left to the unconscious working of the natural influences of society, the rich and the cultivated will certainly acquire it; they obtain it insensibly, gradually, and without the poorer orders knowing that they are obtaining it. But the result is different when, by the operation of a purely democratic constitution, the selection of rulers is submitted to the direct vote of the populace. The lower orders are then told that they are perfectly able to judge; demagogues assert it to them without ceasing: the constitution itself is appealed to as an incontrovertible witness to the fact; as it has placed the supreme power in the hands of the lower and more numerous classes, it would be contravening it to suppose that the real superiority was in the higher and fewer. Moreover, when men are expressly asked to acknowledge their superiors, they are by no means always inclined to do so. They do not object to yield a mute observance, but they refuse a definite act of homage. They will obey, but they will not *say* that they will obey. In consequence, history teaches that under a democratic government those who speak the feelings of the majority themselves, have a greater chance of being chosen to rule, than any of the higher orders, who, under another form of government, would be admitted to be the better judges. The natural effect of such a government is to mislead the poor.

We have no room to notice the specific evils which would accrue from the adoption of an unmixedly democratic constitution. One, however, which has not been quite appreciated follows naturally from the remarks we have made. There is a risk of vulgarising the whole tone, method, and conduct of public business. We see how completely this has been done in America; a country far more fitted, at least in the northern

States, for the democratic experiment than any old country can be. Nor must we imagine that this vulgarity of tone is a mere external expression, not affecting the substance of what is thought, or interfering with the policy of the nation. No defect really eats away so soon the political ability of a nation. A vulgar tone of discussion disgusts cultivated minds with the subject of politics; they will not apply themselves to master a topic which, besides its natural difficulties, is encumbered with disgusting phrases, low arguments, and the undisguised language of coarse selfishness. We all know how we should like to interfere in ward elections, borough politics, or any public matter over which a constant habit of half-educated discussion has diffused an atmosphere of deterring associations. A high morality, too, shrinks with the inevitable shyness of superiority from intruding itself into the presence of low debates. The inevitable consequence of vulgarising our Parliament would be the deterioration of public opinion, not only in its more refined elements, but in all the tangible benefits we derive from the application to politics of thoroughly cultivated minds.

We can only allude briefly to the refutation of the purely democratic theory with which the facts of English history supply us. It is frequently something like pedantry when reference is made to the origin of the House of Commons as a source of *data* for deciding on the proper constitution for it now. What might have been a proper constitution for it when it was an inconsiderable part of the government, may be a most improper one now that it is the ruling part. Still, one brief remark may be advanced as to the early history of our representative system, which will have an important reference to the topic. "Whilst," writes one of our soundest constitutional antiquaries, "boroughs were thus reluctant to return members, and burgesses disinclined to serve in that capacity, the sheriffs assumed a right of sending or omitting precepts at their pleasure. Where boroughs were unwilling or unable to send representatives, the sheriff, from favour or indulgence, withheld the precept, which in strictness he was bound to issue, and thus acquired a discretionary power of settling what places were to

elect, and what places were not to elect, members of Parliament. In his return to the writ of summons, he sometimes reported that he had sent his precept to a borough, but had received no answer to it. Sometimes he asserted without the slightest regard to truth, that there were no more cities or boroughs in his bailiwick than those mentioned in his return. At other times he qualified this assertion by adding that there were none fit to send members to Parliament, or that could be induced to send them. No notice seems ever to have been taken of these proceedings of the sheriffs; nor is there the slightest ground for suspecting that in the exercise of his discretionary power he was directed by any secret instructions from the king and council: "I have never seen or heard," says Brady, "of any particular directions from the king and council or others to the sheriffs, for sending their precepts to this or that borough only and not to others". *"Provided there was a sufficient attendance of members for the public business, the government seem to have been indifferent to the number that came, or to the number of places from which they were sent."*[1] The public business of that time was different from the public business which is now transacted by Parliament; but we may paraphrase the sentence into one that is applicable to us. Provided we have a House of Commons coinciding in opinion with the general mass of the public, and containing representatives competent to express the peculiar sentiments of all peculiar classes, we have provided for our "public business"; we need not trouble ourselves much further, we shall have attained all reasonable objects of desire, and established a polity with which we may be content.

The most obvious way of attempting this is, to represent, or attempt to represent, intelligence directly. The simplest plan of embodying public opinion in a legislature, is to give a special representation in that legislature, to the politically intelligent persons who create that opinion. To attain this end directly is, however, impossible. There is no test of intelligence which a revising barrister could examine, on which attorneys could argue before him. The absurdity of the idea is

[1] Allen on Parliamentary Reform, 1832.

only rendered more evident by the few proposals which are made in the hope of realising it. Mr. Holyoake proposes that the franchise should be given to those who could pass a political examination; an examination, that is, in some standard text-book—Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, or some work of equal reputation. But it does not need to be explained that this would enfranchise extremely few people in a country. Only a few persons give, or can give, a scientific attention to politics; and very many who cannot, are in every respect competent to give their votes as electors, and even to serve as representatives. It is probable that the adoption of such an examination suffrage, in addition to the kinds of suffrage which exist now, would not add one per cent. to the present constituencies; and that if it were made a necessary qualification for the possession of a vote, we should thereby disfranchise ninety-nine hundredths of the country. A second proposal with the same object is, to give votes to all members of "learned societies". But this would be contemptibly futile. There is no security whatever that members of learned societies should be really learned. They are close corporations; and the only check on the admission of improper persons in future is the discretion of those who have been admitted already. At present most members of such societies undoubtedly have an interest in the objects for which they were formed; but create a political motive, and a skilful Parliamentary agent will soon fill the lists with the names of persons not celebrated for scientific learning, but who know how to vote correctly upon occasion. The idea of a direct representation of intelligence wholly fails from the non-existence of a visible criterion of that intelligence. All that can be done in this direction must be effected by a gradual extension of the principle which has given members to our universities. No one can obtain admission to these bodies without a prolonged course of study, or without passing a strict examination in several subjects. This is a kind of franchise not to be manufactured; it is only obtained as a collateral advantage, by persons who are in pursuit of quite different objects. Such bodies, however, are obviously few, and such kinds of franchise are necessarily

limited. But they should be extended as far as possible; and as many such bodies as can be found will tend to supply us with an additional mode of giving a representation to cultivation and refinement—an object which we noticed as one of the desirable ends apparently least provided for by the letter of our present system.[1]

The criteria by which a franchise can be determined must have two characteristics. They must be evident and conspicuous—tests about which there can be no question. Our registration courts cannot decide metaphysical niceties; our machinery must be tough, if it is to stand the wear and tear of eager contests. Secondly, as we have explained, such criteria must be difficult to manufacture for a political object. Our tests must not be counterfeited, and they must be conspicuous. These two requirements nearly confine us to a property qualification. Property is, indeed, a very imperfect test of intelligence; but it is some test. If it has been inherited, it guarantees education; if acquired, it guarantees ability. Either way it assures us of something. In all countries where anything has prevailed short of manhood suffrage, the principal limitation has been founded on criteria derived from property. And it is very important to observe that there is a special appropriateness in the selection. Property has not only a certain connection with general intelligence, but it has a peculiar connection with *political* intelligence. It is a great guide to a good judgment to have

[1] In relation to this subject, we must call special attention to the claims of the University of London and of the Scotch Universities to representation in Parliament. The former University had a distinct pledge from the Government which founded it that it should be placed on an equality in every respect with Oxford and Cambridge. And such Universities would not only introduce additional representatives of intellectual culture into the House of Commons, but representatives also of *free* intellectual culture, as distinguished from the representatives of the ecclesiastical culture of the older Universities. Mr. Bright has reproached the members for Oxford and Cambridge Universities with their habitual antagonism to Reform. This is, we fear, a true accusation. At a time when educational questions are engrossing a larger and larger share of public attention, an adequate representation of *liberal* intellectual culture is most desirable in the House of Commons.

much to lose by a bad judgment. Generally speaking, the welfare of a country will be most dear to those who are well off there. Some considerations, it is true, may limit this principle: great wealth has an emasculating tendency; the knowledge that they have much at stake may make men timid in action, and too anxious, for the successful discharge of high duties: still the broad conclusion is unaffected, that the possession of property is not only an indication of general mind, but has a peculiar tendency to generate *political mind*.

Similar considerations limit the kinds of property to be selected. Our property qualification must be conspicuous and uncreatable. Real property—houses and land—on which our present qualification is based, possess these elements in a pre-eminent degree. We think, however, that they are not the only kinds of property which now in a sufficient degree possess these requirements. They probably were so formerly; but one of the most important alterations in our social condition is the change in the nature of much of our wealth. The growth of what lawyers call personal property has of late years been enormous. Railway shares, canal shares, public funds, bank shares, debentures without number, are only instances of what we mean. Great industrial undertakings are a feature in our age, and it is fitting that a share in them should give a franchise as much as an estate in land. Two conditions only would be necessary to be observed. First, the property must be substantial, as it is called; that is to say, it should be remunerative. Property which does not yield an income is not sufficiently tangible for the purposes of a qualification: men of business may say it is *about* to yield a dividend; but this is always open to infinite argument. It would be necessary to provide that the business property to be represented should have been for a moderate period—say three years—properly remunerative; no one should register for such property unless it had for that period paid a regular interest. Secondly, such property should have been in the possession of the person wishing to register an account of it for at least an equal previous period. This is necessary to prevent the creation of fictitious votes. Real

property is, indeed, exposed to this danger; but the occupancy of houses and lands is a very visible fact, and acts of ownership over the soil are tolerably well known on the spot. It is therefore somewhat difficult to create fictitious tenancies or freeholds. In the case of share-property there is no equal check. The only precaution which can be taken is, to make the pecuniary risk of those who try to create such votes as large as possible. If it be required that the property be registered for a moderate period in the company's books as belonging to the person who claims to vote in respect of it, that person must have during that time the sole right to receive the dividends, and the shares will be liable for all his debts. If a real owner chooses to put a nominal one in this position, he does it at the risk of both principal and income.

We have, then, arrived at the end of another division of our subject. We have shown that the democratic theory is erroneous, and that the consequences of acting upon it would be pernicious. We have discussed the most plausible schemes which have been suggested for testing political intelligence, and we have found reason to think that a property qualification is the best of those modes. It has incidentally appeared that the property qualification which at present exists in England is defective, because it only takes cognisance of a single kind of property. We may now resume the thread of our discussion, which we laid aside to show the errors of the democratic theory. We proceed to indicate how the defects which have been proved to be parts of our existing system of representation can be remedied without impairing its characteristic excellence, without destroying a legislature which is in tolerable conformity with intelligent opinion.

The first defect which we noticed was, that the existing system takes no account of the views and feelings of the working classes, and affords no means for their expression. How, then, can this be supplied? It is evident that this end can only be approached in two ways: we may give to the working classes a *little* influence in all constituencies, or we may give them a good deal of influence in a few constituencies,

By the conditions of the problem they are to have some power in the country, but not all the power; and these are the only two modes in which that end can be effected.

The objection to the first plan is in the nature of a dilemma. Either your arrangements give to the working classes a sufficient power to enable them to decide the choice of the member, or they do not. If they do, they make these classes absolute in the State. If the degree of influence which you grant to them in *every* constituency is sufficient to enable them to choose the representative for that constituency, you have conferred on these inferior classes the unlimited control of the nation. On the other hand, if the degree of influence you give to the poorer classes is not sufficient to enable them to control the choice of any members, you have done nothing. There will be no persons in Parliament inclined by nature and empowered by authority to express their sentiments; their voice will be as much unheard in Parliament as it is now. If the poor are to have a diffused influence in all constituencies, it must be either a great one or a small one. A small one will amount only to the right of voting for a candidate who is *not* elected; a great one will, in reality, be the establishment of democracy.

We shall see the truth of this remark more distinctly if we look a little in detail at one or two of the plans which are proposed with this object. Perhaps the most remarkable of these is that which is at present in operation in Prussia. The suffrage there is very diffused; it amounts to something very like manhood suffrage. But the influence of the lower classes is limited in this way: the constituency is divided into classes according to the amount of direct taxation they respectively pay. The names of those voters who pay the highest amount of tax are put together till a third part of the whole amount of direct taxes paid by the electoral district has been reached. These form the first class. Again, as many names are taken as will make up another third of the same total taxation; and these form the second class. The third class is formed of all the rest, and each class has an equal vote. By this expedient a few very rich persons in class 1, and a moderate number of

moderately rich persons in class 2, have each of them as much influence as the entire number of the poorer orders in class 3. In Prussia a system of double representation has also been adopted, and for that purpose the constituency is divided into sections. But we need not confuse ourselves with prolix detail; the principle is all which is to the purpose. The effect of the plan is evident; it is equivalent to giving to the working classes *one-third* of the influence in every constituency, and no more than one-third. But it is evident that this arrangement not only gives no security for the return of a satisfactory spokesman for the lower orders, but that it provides that no such spokesman shall be returned. The two superior classes are two-thirds of the constituency, and they will take effectual care that no member animated solely with the views of the other third shall ever be elected. So far as class feeling goes, the power given to the lower orders is only the power of voting in a perpetual minority. Undoubtedly, in case of a division between the two superior classes, the lower orders would hold the balance; they would have the power in all constituencies of deciding who should and who should not be the member. But this is not the kind of influence which we have shown it to be desirable that the lower orders should possess. Nothing can be more remote from their proper sphere than the position of arbitrator between the conflicting views of two classes above them. We wish that they should have a few members to express their feelings; we do not wish that they should decide on the critical controversies of their educated fellow-subjects—that they should determine by a casting and final vote the policy of the nation.

Another plan suggested is, that the lower orders should have a single vote, and that persons possessed of property should have a second vote. But statistics show that the power which this would g ve to the lower orders would be enormous. For example, if it should be enacted that all persons living in houses rated at less than £10 shall have one vote, and that those living in houses rated at more than £10, two votes, we should have—

990,000 living in houses of £10 and more than £10 . . . . . } with 1,980,000 votes,
2,280,000 living in houses under £10 . . . with 2,280,000 votes;

giving a clear majority throughout the country to the lowest class of ratepayers; and that majority would of course be much augmented if we conferred (as the advocates of manhood suffrage propose) a vote on every adult male in the country, whether he paid rates or not. The inevitable effect of this plan would be to give an authoritative control to the poorer classes. We might, indeed, try to obviate this by giving a still greater number of votes, say three or four, to the richer class; but then we should reduce the poorer class to an impotent minority throughout the country. In the first case, they would have the power of returning nearly all the members of the legislature; in the second, they would not as a class, or with an irresistible influence, return any.

Another scheme, proposed with this object, at least in part, is the "representation of minorities," as it is commonly called. This is to be attained by the ingenious device of making the number of votes to be possessed by each constituent less than the number of members to be returned by the constituency.[1] The consequence is inevitable: an ascertainable minority of the constituency, by voting for a single candidate only, can effectually secure his election. Thus, if the number of members is three and the number of votes two, any fraction of the constituency greater than two-fifths can be sure of returning a member, if they are in earnest enough on the matter to vote for him only. The proof of this is, that a minority of two-fifths will have exactly as many votes to give to one member as the remaining three-fifths have to give to each of three members. If the constituency be 5000, a minority of two-fifths of the electors, or 2000, would have 2000 votes to give to a single candidate; the remaining 3000 would have only 6000 votes to divide between three candidates, which is only 2000 for each. A minority at all greater than 2000, there-

[1] This was the scheme actually adopted in the Reform Bill of 1867, in the case of all constituencies returning more than two members.—ED.

fore, would, if it managed properly, be certain to return a member. The objection to this plan is, that it would rather tend to give us a Parliament principally elected by the lower orders, with special members among them to express the sentiments of the wealthier classes, than a Parliament generally agreeing with the wealthier classes, and containing special representatives for the lower: the principal representation is almost by express legislation given to the more numerous classes; a less to the minority. It would not solve the problem of giving a certain power to the lower orders, and yet not giving them a predominant power. In the case which we have supposed of a constituency with three members and two votes, the minority also would be a larger one than the richer classes can permanently hope to constitute in the country. Two-fifths of a great town must necessarily include many of the poorer, less cultivated, and less competent. We must remember, also, that the disproportion in number between rich and poor, even between the decidedly poor and the rather wealthy, tends to augment. Society increases most rapidly at its lower end; the wide base extends faster than the narrower summit. At present persons living in "ten-pound houses," or upwards, are something like 21 per cent. of the adult males in the nation, and about 30 per cent. of the rate-paying population. But in process of time the inevitable increase of the humbler orders will reduce them to a far more scanty proportion. The operation of the plan might become even more defective if it were combined, as is often proposed, with an increase of the number of members returned by the constituencies to which it is to be applied. If four members were given to a populous constituency, and each elector were to have three votes, it would require that the minority should be more than three-sevenths[1] of the constituency, to enable it to be certain of returning a candidate. The rich and educated cannot ex-

[1] The rule is, that a minority, to be certain of electing its candidate, must be more than that fraction of the constituency, which may be expressed as follows :—

$$\frac{\text{The number of votes.}}{\text{The number of members + the number of votes.}}$$

pect to remain so large a fraction of the nation as this; they are not so now.

The most plausible way of embodying the minority principle in action would be to give only one vote to each person, and only *two* members to the constituency. In this case, any minority greater than one-third of the constituency would be sure of returning a member; and as this fraction is smaller than those we have mentioned, it would evidently be more suitable to the inevitable fewness of the rich and intelligent. But even this plan would give half the members of the country to the least capable class of voters; and it would have the additional disadvantage of establishing a poor-class member and rich-class member side by side in the same constituency, which would evidently be likely to excite keen jealousy and perpetual local bitterness.

We believe, indeed, that it was an after-thought in the advocates of "minority representation," to propose it as a means of giving some, but not too much, representation to the poor. Its name shows that it was originally devised as a means of giving a representation to minorities *as such*. The extreme case used to be suggested of a party which had a very large minority in every constituency, but which had not a majority in any, and had not therefore any share in the representation. It cannot be denied that such a case might occur: but if the constituencies be, as they should be, of varied kinds, it is very unlikely; and in politics, any contingency that is very unlikely ought never to be thought of; the problems of practical government are quite sufficiently complicated, if those who have the responsibility of solving them deal only with difficulties which are imminent and dangers which are probable. But in the actual working of affairs, and irrespectively of any case so extreme as that which is put forward, the elimination of minorities which takes place at general elections is a process highly beneficial. It is decidedly advantageous that every active or intelligent minority should have adequate spokesmen in the legislature; but it is often not desirable that it should be represented there in exact proportion to its national importance. A very considerable number of by no means unim-

portant persons rather disapproved of the war with Russia; but their views were very inadequately represented in the votes of Parliament, though a few able men adequately expressed their characteristic sentiments. And this was as it should be. The judgment of the Parliament ought always to be coincident with the opinion of the nation; it is extremely important that it should not be less decided. Very frequently it is of less importance which of two courses be selected than that the one which is selected should be consistently adhered to and energetically carried through. If every minority had exactly as much weight in Parliament as it has in the nation, there might be a risk of indecision. Members of Parliament are apt enough to deviate from the plain decisive path, from vanity, from a wish to be original, from a nervous conscientiousness. They are subject to special temptations, which make their decisions less simple and consistent than the nation's. We need a counteracting influence; and it will be no subject for regret if that influence be tolerably strong. It is, therefore, no disadvantage, but the contrary, that a diffused minority in the country is in general rather inadequately represented. A strong conviction in the ruling power will give it strength of volition. The House of Commons should think as the nation thinks; but it should think so rather more strongly, and with somewhat less of wavering.

It was necessary to discuss this aspect of the minority principle, though it may seem a deviation from the investigation into the best mode of giving a due but not an undue influence to the working classes. The advocates of that principle generally consider its giving a proper, and not more than a proper, degree of power to the poor as a subordinate and incidental advantage in a scheme which for other reasons ought to be adopted; it was therefore desirable to prove that no such other reasons exist, as well as that it would very imperfectly, if at all, tend to place the working classes in the position we desire.

Some persons have imagined that the enfranchisement of all the lower orders may be obtained without its attendant consequence, the disfranchisement of other classes, by means of the system of "double representation," which gives to the

primary electors only the power of nominating certain choosers, or secondary electors, who are to select the ultimate representative. This proposal was made by Hume many years ago; it formed part of more than one of the earlier French constitutions; and it is now being tried, as we have observed, in Prussia. We have an example of its effects likewise in a part of the constitution of the United States. Although, therefore, we may not have quite so full a trial of the proposed machinery as we could wish, we have some experience of it. The most obvious objection to it is, that it gives to the working classes the theoretical supremacy as much as a scheme of single representation. Whether the working classes choose the member of Parliament, or whether they choose an intermediate body who are to choose the member, their power of selection will be equally uncontrolled, the overwhelming advantage derived from their numbers will be the same. It is alleged that the working classes will be more fit to choose persons who would exercise an intermediate suffrage; that they could choose persons in their own neighbourhood well known to them, and for whom they had a respect; and that the ultimate representative nominated by these local worthies would be a better person than the working classes would have nominated themselves at first. And in quiet times, and before a good machinery of electioneering influence had been organised, we are inclined to believe that such would be the effect. The working classes might, in the absence of excitement and artificial stimulus, choose persons whom they knew to be better judges than themselves; and, in accordance with the theory of the scheme, would give to them a *bonâ fide* power of independent judgment. But in times of excitement this would not be the case. The primary electors can, if they will, require from the secondary a promise that they will choose such and such members; they can exact a distinct pledge on the subject, and give their votes only to those who will take that pledge. This is actually the case in the election of the President in the United States. As a check on the anticipated inconveniences of universal suffrage, the framers of the federal constitution provided that the President should be chosen by an electoral college elected by uni-

versal suffrage, and not by the nation at large directly. In practice, however, the electoral college is a "sham". Its members are only chosen because they will vote that Mr. Buchanan be President, or that Colonel Fremont be President; no one cares to know anything else about them. There is no debate in the college, no exercise of discretionary judgment: they travel to Washington, and give their vote in a "sealed envelope," and they have no other duty to perform. According to these votes the President is elected. Such, indeed, appears the natural result wherever the lower orders take a strong interest in the selection of the ultimate members for the constituency. They have the power of absolutely determining the choice of those members; and when they care to exercise it, they will exercise it. In Prussia, as it would appear from the newspaper narrative of the recent elections, a real choice has been exercised by the Wahlmänner—the secondary electors. But a few years of experience among a phlegmatic people are not a sufficient trial; there are as yet no parliamentary agents at Berlin. In this country, as in America, an effectual stimulus would soon be applied to the primary electors. If twenty intermediate stages were introduced, the result would be identical: a pledge would be exacted at every stage; the primary body would alone exercise a real choice, and the member would be the direct though disguised nominee of the lower orders. This scheme would everywhere, in critical times, and in *electioneering* countries at all times, give to the democracy an uncontrolled power.

An expedient has, it is true, been proposed for preventing this. It has been suggested that the secondary electors—the electoral college in the American phrase—should have other duties to perform besides that of electing the representative. Suppose, for example, that the electors at large chose a municipal town council, and that the latter elected the representative of the town in the legislature; it is thought that persons with good judgment would be chosen to ensure the due performance of the municipal duties, and that a good member of Parliament would be selected by the *bonâ fide* choice of those persons with good judgment. The scheme would be far too alien to English

habits and traditions to be seriously proposed for adoption by this country even if its abstract theory were sound; but there is an obvious objection of principle to it. The local duties of a municipal council are too different from that of selecting a parliamentary representative to be properly combined with them. We should probably have a town council of political partisans, as was the case before the Municipal Reform Act; and the uninteresting local duties would be sacrificed to the more interesting questions of the Empire. In the real operation of the scheme very much would depend on the *time* at which the town council was elected. If it were elected simultaneously with the general election of members of Parliament, nobody would think of anything but the latter. The town councillors would be chosen to vote for the borough member, and with no regard to any other consideration. We should have a fictitious electoral college, with the added inconvenience that it would be expected to perform duties for which it was not selected, and to which it would be entirely ill-suited. On the other hand, if the town council were elected when the Parliamentary election was not thought of, we might, in times of fluctuating opinion, have a marked opposition between the opinion of the town council and the opinion of the constituency. In an excitable country—and every country which takes a regular interest in politics becomes excitable—no such opposition would be endured. It would be monstrous that the member for London at a critical epoch, say when a question of war or peace was pressing for decision, should be nominated by a town council elected some time before, when no such question was even thought of. There used in the ante-Reform Bill times to be occasional riots when the close corporations, with whom the exclusive suffrage in many boroughs then rested, made a choice not approved of by the population of the town. If this was the case when the borough councillors were only exercising an immemorial right, it will be much more likely to be so when they are but recently nominated agents, deriving their whole authority from the dissentients, and making an unpopular choice in the express name of an angry multitude. We may therefore dismiss the proposed

expedient of double representation with the remark, that if the intermediate body be elected with little reference to its electoral functions, it will be little fitted for such functions; and if it is elected mainly with reference to them, it will have no independent power of choice, but be bound over to elect the exact person whom its constituents have decided to favour.

A much more plausible proposal is suggested by the recommendation which we made some pages back—that the principle which assigns the franchise to those who can show a property qualification should not be confined to real estate, but be extended to every kind of property that yielded an income and was owned *bonâ fide*. A considerable number of the working classes possess savings; not large, it is true, when contrasted with middle-class opulence, but still most important to, and most valued by, those who have hoarded them during a lifetime. The total accumulation is likewise very large when set down in the aggregate. It has been suggested that a suffrage conferred on the owners of moneyed property would of itself enfranchise the most thrifty and careful of the working classes; and that, as these would probably be the best judging of their class, it would be needless to inquire as to the mode in which any others could obtain the franchise. There may be a question whether we do wish simply to find representatives for the best of the working classes. We are not now seeking legislators who will exercise a correct judgment, but rather spokesmen who will express popular sentiments. We need not, however, dwell on this, as there is a more conclusive objection to the plan proposed. Unfortunately, the savings of the working classes are not invested in a form which would be suitable for political purposes. The most pressing need of the poor is a provision for failing health and for old age. They most properly endeavour to satisfy this by subscribing to "benefit societies" or other similar clubs, which, in consideration of a certain periodical payment, guarantee support during sickness, or a sum of money in case of decease. Now this life and health insurance wants all the criteria of a good property qualification. There is no test of its *bonâ fides*. Simulated qualifications might be manufactured by any skilful attorney.

The periodical payment might be easily repaid on pretence of sickness; and it would be perfectly impossible for any revising barrister to detect the fraud. There would be no security that the periodical premium even belonged to the poor man; it might be lent him, and with little risk, by his richer neighbour. Electioneering has conquered many difficulties. It would be easy to have an understanding that the secretary to the society, the clerk of the electioneering attorney, should see that the premium was soon repaid, in name to the poor subscriber, and in fact to the vote-making capitalist. The finances of some of these societies have never been in the best order; and there would be very great difficulty in tracking even a gross electioneering fraud. Perhaps no practical man will question but that the manipulation of a borough attorney would soon change the character of a "benefit society"; it would cease to be, as now, the repository of the real savings of the best working men; it would become a cheap and sure machinery for creating votes in the name of the most corruptible. So large a portion of the savings of thrifty operatives are most properly laid by in these insurance associations, that it is scarcely likely that a moneyed property qualification would give a vote to a considerable proportion even of the very best of them. A few would be admitted by giving the franchise to those who left a certain sum in a savings bank for a certain time; but, to prevent fraud, that time must be considerable, and careful returns, prepared for Lord John Russell's Reform Bill, are said to show that the number enfranchised would be even fewer than might have been expected. At any rate, it would not be safe to rely on such a franchise for creating a Parliamentary organ for the lower classes. Those enfranchised by it would be scattered through a hundred constituencies. There would be no certainty that even one member in the House would speak their sentiments. Moreover, we have doubts whether a constituency composed only of operatives who had a considerable sum in the savings bank after providing, as in all likelihood they would have done, for the wants of their families in case of their death and sickness, would not rather have the feelings of petty capitalists than of skilled labourers. Those who have

just risen above a class can scarcely be relied on for giving expression to its characteristic opinions. However, as it would be scarcely possible to create such a constituency, there is no reason for prolonging an anticipatory discussion on its tendencies. On the whole, therefore, we must, though rather against our wishes, discard the idea of creating a working-class franchise by an extension of the suffrage qualification to all kinds of property. A careful examination appears to show that we could not obtain in that way a characteristic expression for the wants of the masses.

These are the principal schemes which have been proposed for adding to the legislature some proper spokesmen of the wants of the lower classes by giving to those classes *some* influence in every constituency. Our survey of them has confirmed the anticipation with which we set out. The dilemma remains. Either the influence is great enough to determine the choice of the member, or it is not: if it is not, no spokesmen for the working classes will be elected; if it is, no one not thoroughly imbued with the views and sentiments of the lower orders would be chosen,—we should have a democracy.

As this, the first of the only two possible expedients, has failed us, we turn with anxiety to the second. Since it does not seem possible to procure spokesmen for the working classes by a uniform franchise in all constituencies, is it possible to do so by a varying franchise, which shall give votes according to one criterion in one town, and to another criterion in another town? It evidently *is* possible. Whether there are any countervailing objections is a question for discussion, but of the possibility there cannot be a doubt. If all the adult males in Stafford have votes, then the member for Stafford will be elected by universal suffrage; he will be the organ of the lower orders of that place. Supposing that place to be subject in this respect to no important local anomaly, the lower orders there will be like the corresponding classes elsewhere. By taking a fair number of such towns, we may secure ourselves from the mischievous results of local irregularities; we can secure a fair number of spokesmen for the lower orders.

The scheme is not only possible, but has been tried, and in this country. Before the Reform Bill of 1832 there was a great disparity in the suffrage qualification of different constituencies. "A variety of rights of suffrage," said Sir James Mackintosh, in 1818,[1] "is the principle of the English representation;" and he went on to enumerate the various modes in which it might be obtained—by freehold property, by burgage tenure, by payment of scot and lot, etc. The peculiar circumstances of 1832 made it necessary, or seemingly necessary, to abolish these contrasted qualifications. Great abuses prevailed in them, and it would have been difficult to adjust remedies for the removal of those abuses. The great requirement of the moment was a simple bill. During a semi-revolution there was no time for nice reasonings. Something universally intelligible was to be found. The enthusiasm of the country must be concentrated "on the whole bill and nothing but the bill". We must not judge the tumult of that time by the quietude of our own.

At a calmer moment the more philosophic of liberal statesmen were, however, aware of the advantages of the machinery which they were afterwards compelled to destroy. The essay of Sir James Mackintosh, to which we have referred, appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, and was considered at the time as an authoritative exposition of liberal doctrine: and almost the whole of it is devoted to a proof that this system of varying qualification is preferable, not only to universal suffrage, but to *any* uniform "right of franchise". On the point we are particularly considering, he says: "For resistance to oppression, it is peculiarly necessary that the lower, and in some places the lowest, classes should possess the right of suffrage. Their rights would otherwise be less protected than those of any other class: for some individuals of every other class would generally find admittance into the legislature; or, at least, there is no other class which is not connected with some of its members. Some sameness of interest, and some fellow-feeling, would therefore protect every other class, even

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, No. LXI., article "Universal Suffrage"; an admirable essay, singularly worth reading at present.

if not directly represented. But in the uneducated classes, none can either sit in a representative assembly, or be connected on an equal footing with its members. The right of suffrage, therefore, is the only means by which they can make their voice heard in its deliberations. They also often send to a representative assembly members whose character is an important element in its composition—men of popular talents, principles, and feelings; quick in suspecting oppression, bold in resisting it; not thinking favourably of the powerful; listening, almost with credulity, to the complaints of the humble and the feeble; and impelled by ambition, where they are not prompted by generosity, to be the champions of the defenceless. It is nothing to say that such men require to be checked and restrained by others of a different character; this may be truly said of every other class. It is to no purpose to observe, that an assembly exclusively composed of them would be ill fitted for the duties of legislation; for the same observation would be perfectly applicable to any other of those bodies which make useful parts of a mixed and various assembly." Sir James had evidently the words of the member for Westminister sounding in his ears. His words are not an expression of merely speculative approbation; they are a copy from the life.

An authority still more remarkable remains. Lord John Russell, in 1821, expressed a very decided opinion on the advantages of having a different scale of property qualification in different places, and rather boldly grappled with an obvious objection to it. We quote the passage: "All parts of the country, and all classes of the people, ought to have a share in elections. If this is not the case, the excluded part or class of the nation will become of no importance in the eyes of the rest: its favour will never be courted in the country, and its interests will never be vigilantly guarded in the legislature. Consequently, in proportion to the general freedom of the community will be the discontent excited in the deprived class by the sentence of nullity and inactivity pronounced upon them. Every system of uniform suffrage except universal contains this dark blot. And universal suffrage, in pretend-

ing to avoid it, gives the whole power to the highest and the lowest, to money and to multitude; and thus disfranchises the middle class—the most disinterested, the most independent, and the most unprejudiced of all. It is not necessary, however, although every class ought to have an influence in elections, that every member of every class should have a vote. A butcher at Hackney, who gives his vote perhaps once in twelve years at an election for the county of Middlesex, has scarcely any advantage over another butcher at the same place who has no vote at all. And even if he had, the interest of the State is in these matters the chief thing to be consulted; and that is as well served by the suffrage of some of each class, as by that of all of each class." The necessary effect of the Act of 1832 has been to make us forget the value of what the authors of it considered a most beneficial part of our representative system. That such great statesmen should have pronounced such panegyrics on the diversity of qualifications in different constituencies, when it was a living reality before their eyes, shows at least that it is practicable and possible.

The plan is, indeed, liable to several objections: it is not to be expected that in a complicated subject any scheme which is absolutely free even from serious inconveniences could be suggested. By far the most popular objection is that which Lord John Russell noticed in the passage we have just cited. There is a sense of unfairness in the project. Why should an artisan in Liverpool have a vote, and an artisan in Macclesfield no vote? Why should the richer classes in one constituency be disfranchised by the wholesale admission of their poorer neighbours, and the richer classes in another constituency not be so disfranchised? The answer is suggested by a portion of our preceding remarks. No one has a right, as we have seen, to any portion of political power which he cannot exercise without preventing some others from exercising better that or some greater power. If all the operatives in the great towns were enfranchised, they would prevent the higher classes from exercising any power: and this is the reply to the unenfranchised artisan in Macclesfield. If there were no representatives

of the working classes in Parliament, its measures might be less beneficial, and its debates would be imperfect; the higher classes in some great towns must have less power than in some other great towns, because a uniform suffrage impedes the beneficial work of Parliament, and prevents the ruling legislature from exercising its nearly omnipotent power well and justly. To have a good Parliament, we must disfranchise some good constituents. Perhaps, indeed, the whole difficulty is overrated. We see every day that, so far as the middle classes are concerned, it is of no perceptible consequence to the individual whether he has a vote or not: it is of great consequence to him that the supreme legislature should accord with the views of his class and himself; but whether he has voted for any particular member of that legislature is a trifle. We never dream in society of asking whether the person we are talking to has a vote or not. Both live, and live equally, in the atmosphere of politics. Similarly, it is of great importance to the lower classes that their feelings should be sufficiently expressed in Parliament; but which of them votes for the person who should express them is of no consequence at all. The non-voter ought to take as much interest in politics as the voter. When *all* of a class cannot exercise power without impeding a more qualified class, we may select, from considerations of convenience, those members of the less qualified class who are to have power. There is no injustice in allowing expediency to adjust the claims of persons similarly entitled.

It may also be objected that this plan of representing the lower classes does not give them the general instruction which the exercise of the suffrage is supposed to bestow. An unenfranchised artisan in Macclesfield is not educated by giving the suffrage to an artisan in Manchester. But it is a mistake to suppose that there is much, if any, instruction in the personal exercise of the franchise. Popular elections have no doubt a didactic influence on the community at large; they diffuse an interest in great affairs through the country; but the elevating effect of giving a vote is always infinitesimally small. Among the lower classes it is a question whether the risk of moral deterioration does not quite balance the hope of moral elevation.

Popular institutions educate by the intellectual atmosphere which they constantly create, and not by the occasional decisions which they require. And were it otherwise, intellectual instruction is but a secondary benefit of popular government; and we must not throw away, in the hope of increasing it, the primary advantage of being well governed. We believe too that, in fact, mere existence under a good government is more instructive than the power of now and then contributing to a bad government.

We are more afraid of the objection that this inequality of suffrage in otherwise similar constituencies is an anomaly which may grow up imperceptibly, as it did before the Reform Bill, but cannot now be created *de novo*. We admit the difficulty: we are well aware that this inequality, like every other expedient in politics to which the objections are apparent and the advantages latent, is far easier to preserve than to originate. But when great interests are at stake, we should only give up that which is impossible; what is merely difficult should be done. Moreover, a little examination will, we think, show that the obstacles are far slighter than they might seem at first sight.

From this point of view it is worth remarking, that the inequality of suffrage qualification to a certain extent still exists. The effect of the Reform Act has been to hide and diminish, but not to annihilate, the inequalities which existed before. The constituencies in which these inequalities existed were naturally opposed to their abolition, and a compromise was effected. All persons duly qualified to vote on the 7th June, 1832, were to retain their right for life, subject to certain conditions of residence and registration. In all boroughs, likewise, in which freedom of the borough, whether acquired by birth or servitude prescriptively, gave a vote, that franchise was to a certain extent retained. The freemen of such boroughs have votes now just as before, and freedom can be acquired in the same way: no change on this point was effected in 1832, except that a borough franchise so obtained is forfeited by non-residence in the borough. The number of these anomalous votes is still very considerable. Mr. Newmarch has shown that in 1853 it amounted to 60,565, which

is more than one-seventh of 400,000, the number (or nearly so) of borough electors at that time. We have therefore a very considerable amount of inequality in our present system; we should scarcely propose to increase it, but to distribute it more usefully.

The freemen of Coventry, Derby, Leicester, are not a class of whom we wish to undertake the defence; and in many towns the existence of those old rights is a recognised nuisance. We are not prepared to approve *all* anomalies in our representation. Our principles are especially opposed to the enfranchisement of favoured individuals in minor towns—few enough to be bought, corruptible enough to wish to be bought; who are not in general the majority of the constituency, but who exercise important influence because they can throw in a purchasable balance of votes on critical occasions; who are in no respect fair representatives of the working classes, who do not return to the House a single fit person willing to be spokesman for them. We argue merely that the effect of the Act of 1832 has only been to diminish the inequality of suffrage qualification before existing; and by no means to establish, even if a single act of Parliament could have so done, the erroneous principle that there is to be no inequality.

But the most effectual way of showing that it is possible to create *de novo* a beneficial variety of property qualifications, is to point out how it can be done. If it be admitted that we should found working-class constituencies, it is clear that we should found them where the working classes live. This is of course in the great seats of industry, where work is plentiful and constant. Those who reside in such towns are likewise the most political part of the class: the agricultural labourers, scattered in rural parishes, with low wages and little knowledge, have no views and no sentiments which admit of Parliamentary expression; they have no political thoughts. If we wish to give due expression, and not more than due expression, to the ideas of the democracy, we must select some few of the very largest towns, where its characteristic elements are most congregated. It would have been more fortunate if these towns had acquired such a franchise prescriptively; but

it would have been all but miraculous if such had been the case. Many of our greatest towns are situated in what, in more purely agricultural times, were very uninfluential districts; we must not expect an hereditary franchise for newly-created interests. As it is necessary to have a rule of selection, the best which can be suggested is the rule of population; we would propose, therefore, that in the very largest towns in England[1] there should be what Mr. Bright advocates for all towns, a rate-paying franchise. If this were extended to all towns having more than 75,000 inhabitants, it would include at present London, Liverpool, Manchester, the Tower Hamlets, Marylebone, Finsbury, Bristol, Birmingham, Lambeth, Westminster, Leeds, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, Southwark, Greenwich, Bradford, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Salford. If there were a *bonâ fide* representation of the working classes in these towns, they could not complain of a class disfranchisement; there would be adequate spokesmen for them. A member speaking the voice of places where such numbers of operatives

[1] It may, indeed, be objected that these large constituencies are just the ones in which a rate-paying franchise would have the most conclusively democratic effect; and that if we concede it as to these, it is not worth while to resist it with respect to others in which we might hope, by the influence of wealth and social standing, to counteract more or less its democratic tendency. But facts show that in an immense number of constituencies these influences could not control that tendency effectually. If an Act giving votes to all rate-payers be ever passed, it will probably be accompanied by a readjustment of the electoral districts on a democratic principle, which would augment the influence of mere numbers. But we need not consider this, since the introduction of the rate-paying franchise into our present constituencies would introduce a new element, much too large to be easily managed by indirect influences. It is of course not known exactly how large that new element would be; but very careful tables have been compiled of the number of inhabited houses in our present boroughs; and as the number of women rated in respect of them is no doubt small, all but a minute fraction of such houses would give a qualification to a male voter. Now it appears that in all except ten borough constituencies the number of inhabited houses was in 1852, and doubtless is still, more than double that of the present electors; and consequently the *new* element which would be introduced would greatly preponderate over, and in fact disfranchise, the old. It is evident that it would be very difficult to manage so many new voters by any indirect influences.

are congregated, could speak the sentiments of that class with authority. No one could be unaware that the constituency in these large towns was ultra-democratic. The representation of the lower orders would be conspicuous as well as effectual.

Nor would the number of representatives so given to the lower classes be sufficient to deteriorate the general character of the legislature. It would not amount to forty for England and Wales, or to fifty for the United Kingdom; a considerable number, no doubt, but not sufficient to destroy the representative character of a house of 658 members. The House of Commons would still represent the educated classes as a whole; its opinion would still be their opinion; the performance of its ruling function would be unimpaired; and that of its expressive function would be improved.

We have dwelt so long on this part of our subject, that we shall not be able to devote as much space as we could wish to the explanation of the mode in which we think the remaining defects of our representative system should be remedied. We can only state briefly a few of the most important considerations.

The first of those defects, which we specified at the outset, is the existence of small boroughs, which are either in the hands of individual proprietors or have become in the process of time nests of corruption. We need not specify examples; the fact is sufficiently familiar. Indeed, all small boroughs in the course of years must rapidly tend towards one or other of these fates. A great deal of wealth in this country seeks to invest itself politically. A small borough of this sort necessarily contains a considerable number of corruptible individuals; year by year skilful Parliamentary agents ascertain who these individuals are, and buy them. The continual temptation is too much for shop-keeping humanity; with every election the number of purchasable votes tends to increase: one would not have yielded, only he wanted a new shop front; another, who is proof against plate-glass, desires money to put out his son in the world. Gradually an atmosphere of corruption closes over the borough, and men of the world cease to expect purity from it. The only way in which this sort of retail

purchase can be escaped is by a wholesale purchase. A rich proprietor may buy a large majority of vote-conferring properties in the borough, and so become despotic in the town. Each presentation (to borrow a phrase from the Church) is not in that case sold on the day of election, because the advowson has been bought before by some one who has a use for it.

We may escape, then, the necessity of ascertaining the electoral corruption of particular boroughs, and lay it down as a general condition of permanent purity that a constituency should contain a fixed number—five hundred, suppose, electors. It is quite true that this remedy is not certainly effectual: there are many boroughs, where the enfranchised constituency exceeds this number, in which the elections are not at all what we should wish. But the tendency of such a measure is plain. It prevents the wholesale purchase by the neighbouring proprietors, because it makes the property too large for ordinary wealth to buy. It *tends* to prevent the retail purchase by increasing the supply of votes—which always lessens their market value, and in very many cases reduces it below the price which will tempt ordinary voters to corruption. The expedient is not a perfectly effectual one, but at least it is a considerable palliative.

What, then, is to be done with boroughs below the prescribed limits? There are in England and Wales about sixty-seven members, elected by forty-two of such boroughs. What course would it be wisest to take with respect to such seats? The most easy plan in theory is to annihilate them at once, to have a new schedule A of places disfranchised. But it is easier to write such a recommendation in an essay than to carry the enactment in practice. These seats have the protective instincts of property. Money has been spent on many of them for a course of years: in all of them the present electors would vote nearly as a man against the abolition of "themselves". The strenuous resistance of the members for such seats must be expected to any bill which should propose to abolish them *in toto*. And such resistance would be the more effectual, because in all likelihood it would be indirect.

The interested members, unless a sinister policy were unusually wanting in its characteristic acuteness, would not risk a division on the unpleasant question of abolishing or not abolishing their own seats. They would throw the probably decisive weight of their votes into the scale most inconvenient to the Government proposing that abolition; would combine with every strong opposition to it; in the present state of parties, would soon reduce it to a minority. A proposal to disfranchise many boroughs would soon issue in the resignation of the proposing Government.

We must therefore assume that for the present, to some considerable extent, the influence of such boroughs must continue to exist. In 1832 there was a popular feeling which carried everything before it. Now all we can hope to carry is a compromise. As a compromise, the best expedient which we can suggest is to combine such boroughs. The English respect for vested interests would preclude the popularity of a sweeping Act; but the English liking for a moderate expedient would be a strong support to any measure that could be so called. The effect of such a combination would probably be in great part to set the joint constituency free from the yoke of great proprietors. If Lord A is supreme in borough *a*, and Mr. B in town *b*, *a* and *b* combined will probably be controlled by neither. The local feeling of *b* will resist Lord A; that of *a* would be rigid to the enticements of Mr. B. If one of the burghs should be "independent," that is to say, purchased voter by voter at each election, its inhabitants would probably rather be purchased by any one than by the proprietor of the antagonistic borough. We are aware that these are not very attractive considerations; but what are we to do? *Ils ont des canons.* We must make the best terms we can with constituencies which we cannot hope entirely to destroy.

We shall be asked why we group these existing boroughs with one another, instead of combining them with new towns not now possessed of the borough franchise, which are therefore at present comparatively uncorrupt. We admit that, in some individual cases, there may be conclusive reasons for taking the latter course; but we think that there are political

arguments which should disincline us from adopting it in general.

We saw reason to believe that the principal defects of our House of Commons, as a *ruling* assembly, were an excessive bias to the landed interest, and an insufficient sympathy with the growing interests of the country. On this account it is desirable not to take from the county constituencies all the liberalising element which they at present possess; on the contrary, it would be desirable, if possible, to increase it. We should, however, weaken that liberal element very materially if, in our extreme desire to remedy borough corruption, we extracted from the constituency of the counties the inhabitants of all their larger towns. The effect of Mr. Locke King's proposal to reduce the county franchise from £50 to £10, if it should be adopted, as it probably will be, will be to augment the county influence of the towns which have no borough member. We must not counteract this tendency. As we think it desirable to diminish the *sectarian* character of our county members, we must not adopt the most effectual of all schemes for preserving it unimpaired—we must not absorb into the boroughs all other influences save those of the country gentlemen.

Our second reason for preferring to combine the very small boroughs with one another rather than to unite each of them with some town at present unenfranchised is, that we wish to diminish the number of seats for such constituencies. If we annexed new elements to each of them, there would be a plausible argument for not diminishing their number. But, as has been explained, we wish to provide a more ample representation for the growing districts of the country; and there is a very general and well-grounded opinion that the House of Commons is already quite sufficiently numerous. In order, therefore, to increase the representation of the progressive parts of England in the proportion which seems desirable, we must take from the decaying or stationary towns of the less active parts of the country the right of sending members which they have now. On a great scale, the same plan was adopted in 1832: it was then necessary to remedy a

great evil; and therefore it was necessary that the number of seats disfranchised should be great, and the number of newly enfranchised towns considerable also. As we have shown, no such enormous evil remains at present to be remedied. The judgment of Parliament coincides fairly, if not precisely, with the opinion of the nation. All we have to correct is, a slight bias in one direction, and a perceptible but not extreme deficiency of sympathy in another. The changes we have to make, therefore, may be slight in comparison with those of 1832; still, so important is it that Parliament should really coincide in opinion with the nation, that we should take account of the beginnings of a discrepancy; while the topic of reform in our electoral system is definitely before the public, we should take the opportunity of correcting the undue inclination of the legislature towards the less active, and its contrast of feeling (which though slight is real) to the more active part of the community.

We are the more certain that it is advisable to make some such change as this, because, as we have before observed, we believe this uneasy consciousness of the less perfect representation of the progressive elements in the nation, as compared with the unprogressive, to be the secret source of almost all the slight popular enthusiasm which now exists in favour of reform. The external form of what is proposed is, indeed, different; the principal, as well as the most popular, suggestion is one for the representation of the working classes. We have no doubt that those who are at the head of that movement, as well as those who join in it, quite believe that such is their true object. But it is at least an odd undertaking to be headed by master manufacturers. Whatever view we may take of the effects of universal or of rate-paying franchise on other parts of the nation, there can be little question that its influence would be detrimental to the power of opulent capitalists. We must alter the world before there ceases to be some opposition of feeling (there is often a momentary opposition of *interest*) between the mill-owner and his work-people. In the days of the short-time agitation both parties understood this perfectly. Even now a Parliament of capitalists would probably propose

to repeal the ten-hours' bill; a Parliament of working men would very likely desire to extend its principle. To say the least, it is strange that the characteristic men of one class should be so ready to throw all power into the hands of the other.

A letter from Mr. Bright himself to a Manchester association puts the matter in a different light. "On a great occasion," he tells us, "like the one now before the country, there will be differences of opinion. Some think one extent of franchise better than another. Some are for a £6 rental; some are for a £5 rental; you are for the extension of the right of voting to every man. Now I prefer to establish the Parliamentary suffrage on the basis which has been tried for some centuries in our parishes, and which has been adopted at a recent period in our poor-law unions and in our municipal governments; with some needless restriction, with regard to the municipal franchise, which I would not introduce into our Parliamentary franchise. The more public opinion is freely and honestly expressed, the more distinctly will a government, engaged in preparing a Reform Bill, be able to discover which is the point likely to be most satisfactory to the public. I consider these differences of opinion on the subject as of trifling importance when compared with the question of the distribution of seats and members. *This is the vital point in the coming bill;* and unless it be well watched, you may get any amount of suffrage, and yet find, after all, that you have lost the substance, and are playing merely with the shadow of popular representation."

This at least is an intelligible doctrine. A redistribution of seats in proportion to population would indisputably be most advantageous to Mr. Bright and his associates. Some of their school have made a calculation that sixty-three boroughs, returning eighty-five members, have not, taken together, as many electors as Manchester, which returns but two. And, independently of extreme cases, it is quite indisputable that the large towns and crowded populations of Lancashire and the West Riding would, in any grouping based on electoral numbers, assume a proportionate magnitude that would be quite different from that which they have at present. If such a readjustment could be

carried, *and the present franchise retained*, the followers of Mr. Bright would be one of the most numerous divisions of the House of Commons. It is true that the advantage of their success must be shared with the class most antagonistic to them in feeling. The county representation would have to be extended if electoral numbers, or any mere numbers, were to be taken as the guide to a new adjustment. But Mr. Bright probably does not fear a conflict with Mr. Newdegate. We can well understand that he should esteem the lowering of the franchise, which would impair his power, less important than a reapportionment of members, which must increase it.

We can spare but a few words to show the unsoundness of the principle on which the proposed readjustment is to be based; and we would hope that only a few words are needed. Mr. Bright considers it an obvious absurdity that a constituency of 1000 electors should return a member, and that another constituency with 5000 should return but one member also. Such a variety is nevertheless *primâ facie* beneficial: it would be a probable sign of the complete imperfection of an electoral organisation if every constituency in it were equally numerous. All such systems must tend to give undue preponderance to some classes, and to deny, not only substantial influence, but even bare expression, to the views of other classes. If the nation be homogeneous, equal patches of population will tend to return similar members. The more numerous the constituency, the more likely is this to be the result. Thousand A *may* differ from Thousand B; but Million A will assuredly be identical with Million B. The doctrine of chances forbids us to expect contrasted representatives from constituencies with a family likeness. If, indeed, the nation should not be homogeneous, but should contain two very numerous classes of unlike tendencies, whose harmony is preserved by the continual arbitration of less numerous classes intermediate between them, the result of an equal division of electoral districts would be different, and it would be worse. Each of the intermediate classes would be merged in one of the larger. We may, however, look at the living operation, and not at the bare theory. We have mentioned the contrast between Mr. Bright and Mr.

Newdegate. What is it that prevents the continual disturbance of Parliamentary peace between two classes of men so dissimilar as the members for counties—especially purely agricultural counties—and members for manufacturing cities? Obviously the existence of the intermediate elements, of members sent up by agricultural towns, which contain industrial elements, and by smaller manufacturing towns, which have no notion of being offered in sacrifice to the populace of great cities. An electoral system composed of "population sections" would not give us a representative assembly adapted to the performance of either of its two functions. A House of Commons so elected would not represent the public opinion of the country, and therefore could not rule it as it should be ruled. The impartial and arbitrating element would be deficient. And, as has been explained, this complete deficiency in the qualities necessary to a ruling legislature would not be compensated by any excellence in the qualities necessary to secure a good expression of the grievances and opinions of all classes. Old English good sense selected a town to send representatives separately from a county in which it was situated because it saw there the conspicuous focus of separate feelings, separate interests, possibly separate complaints. Our new reformers would undo this wise arrangement. They would (at least, such is the logical tendency of their argument) destroy those bounds and limits to constituencies which secure a *character* to the constituency; they would represent the shipping interest by throwing Hull into the county of York and Grimsby into the county of Lincoln: distinct definition is all that is necessary to disprove such ideas.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the evident untenableness of Mr. Bright's views gives them a claim on our attention. It is an indication of social unsoundness that men of ability and energy sincerely advocate very absurd theories, and are able to collect considerable audiences to applaud those theories. We may speak of our national contentment; but the answer comes, What, then, do these people complain of? We must not rest satisfied with a mere refutation of the doctrines which are avowed, or an exposition of the mischievous consequences of

the plans proposed. There are certain theories of political philosophy which supply ready arguments against almost every state of society which has been able to maintain a long existence. These heresies float among the most ordinary ideas of mankind, and are ready without the least research to the hand of whoever may believe that he wants them. Latent discontent with the existing form of government catches hastily at whatever justifies it; it seeks in these old forms of false doctrine a logical basis for itself. One of these heresies is the purely democratic theory of government; it has very rarely indeed been adopted as a guide to action, but its existence is nearly as old as political speculation. In every age and country a class which has not as much power as it thinks it ought to have snatches at the notion that all classes ought to have equal power. Such an "uneasy class" believes that it ought to have as much power as the class which is in possession; and not liking to put forward even to itself a selfish claim of individual merit, it tries to found its pretensions on the "equal rights of all mankind". Mr. Burke described the first East Indian nabobs as "Jacobins almost to a man," because they did not find their social position "proportionate to their new wealth". We cannot fail to observe that the new business wealth of the present day (of which Mr. Bright is the orator and mouthpiece) has a tendency to democracy for the same reason. Such a symptom in the body politic is an indication of danger. So energetic a class as the creators of Manchester need to be conciliated; their active intelligence has rights which assuredly it will make heard. The great political want of our day is a *capitalist conservatism.* If we could enlist the intelligent creators of wealth in the ranks of those who would give their due influence to intelligence and property, we should have almost secured the stability of our constitution; we should have pacified its most dangerous assailants; we should count them among our most active allies. If the transfer of a moderate number of seats in Parliament from boroughs, which scarcely profess to exercise an independent choice of representatives, to large and growing towns would only in a subordinate degree conduce to this effect, such a transfer should be made. There

would still be enough of smaller constituencies for all purposes that are useful.

We have, therefore, completed our task. We have shown the defects which our present system of representation seems to contain; and we have endeavoured to indicate the mode in which those defects might, we think, be remedied. The subject is one of great complexity and extent, and very difficult to discuss within the limits of an article. To be considered profitably, it must be considered as a whole; and it will be evident from our own pages how much space any attempt to discuss the entire topic necessarily requires. Whatever errors of detail may be found in our opinions, we cannot doubt that our general purpose has been correct. A real statesman at the present day must endeavour to enlarge the influence of the growing parts of the nation, as compared with the stationary; to augment the influence of the capitalist classes, but to withstand the pernicious theories which some of them for the moment advocate; to organise an expression for the desires of the lower orders, but to withstand even the commencement of a democratic revolution.

NOTE.

18th February, 1859.

There are some points suggested by the previous discussion which I was unable from want of space, to treat as I should have wished; and some, too, which have been brought out more clearly by the events of the last few weeks. I gladly, therefore, make use of the opportunity afforded me by the republication of the foregoing essay to make some additional remarks.

A striking and most healthy symptom in the public mind in reference to Reform just now is its *freshness*. In former times the Tory party never thought about the matter. One of their traditional tenets, as a party, was an opposition to Reform; and all who desired a further change than that of 1832 were in their eyes Radicals and Democrats. The subject was not one for argument. The Liberals, on the other hand, had a vague

kind of abstract idea that the franchise must be extended some time or other. They would have been shocked to hear themselves called Democrats; but when they talked about Reform, their language, as far as it had a meaning at all, had a democratic meaning. It was imagined that as soon as the "masses" had acquired a certain minimum of education, they would have a claim of right to be enfranchised; and it was overlooked that in practice this would be equivalent to the disfranchisement of all other classes, and would give the lower orders the uncontrolled guidance of the community. At present the state of public opinion is infinitely more hopeful. The Tories have been stimulated to the consideration of the subject. As a government of their own is to propose a Reform Bill, it is impossible any longer to regard the topic as beyond the range of permitted speculation. The Liberals likewise have been rather rudely awakened to the unpleasant consequences of their former ideas. Mr. Bright, more than any one else, should have the credit of arousing the present liberal reaction against democracy. He has propounded in a definite plan what was before an intangible idea. The subject has come within the range of practical English thought almost for the first time; and, as usual, the tone of habitual discussion on it has deepened and improved. A feeling of sympathy for intelligent working people is perhaps stronger than ever, and there is every wish that they should, if possible, have some power in the community; but there is a distinct and settled determination that they shall not have all the power.

I have dwelt so fully on this part of the subject in the preceding essay, that it is not necessary for me now to resume the general discussion of it. The public mind is in a much more likely mood to entertain what appear to me to be just ideas than it ever was before, or that I could have hoped it would be now. There are one or two incidental remarks, however, which it is necessary to make on the subject.

The most telling objection to the expedient suggested in the foregoing essay for representing the working classes—viz. that of lowering the qualification so as to include them in the great seats of industry, but not elsewhere—is, that it sacrifices the

political power of the higher classes in those important places. The higher classes in Manchester cannot be expected to *like* that they should be disfranchised by the wholesale enfranchisement of the working men in Manchester. That it should ever be pleasant, it would be impossible to hope; but there are some considerations which tend, I think, to make it less unpleasant than might be imagined at first sight.

In the first place, a great deal of the anticipated calamity has happened, and is being endured. The creators of the wealth of Manchester—and when I speak of Manchester, I only do so because it stands out in the public mind as a type and symbol of cities of the class—are not the ten-pound householders who return its members. These are the small shopkeepers and petty dealers, who swarm and congregate about every great commercial place; but who bear to the merchants and manufacturers of those places much the same relation that the sutlers of a camp bear to its disciplined army. In London, where the geographical division of industrial pursuits is unusually evident, there are whole constituencies composed nearly exclusively of these rather mean attendants on commercial civilisation. The Tower Hamlets contain very little else; and any one can see by walking through them how little their population has of the cultivated energy and enlarged acuteness commonly to be found in a great merchant. In other towns—Liverpool is a strong contrast in this respect to London—this attendant community of inferior dealers resides in the closest proximity to the most important mercantile offices—in the focus of business transactions. The effect of the Act of 1832 has been to throw the representation of the large trading towns into the hands of these inferior traders, whose vicinity to the greater ones is inevitable, and whose numbers are overwhelming. A portion of the higher class of traders sympathise in the views of the lower; this portion assume to be the leaders of the place, and give to persons at a distance an idea of its tendencies quite different from what would be desired by the higher citizens in general. There has always been an anti-Manchester party at Manchester. The school which Mr. Bright represents has not the undisputed

lead among the manufacturing and mercantile men of the north which they are commonly thought to have. The most cultivated people there are perhaps generally opposed to it. The highest and best class of the traders in great commercial towns are already disfranchised, and it would, in reality, be better for them that it should be thoroughly understood to be so. At present the world imagines that their present representatives express their feelings, and state their opinions. If the representation of such places were avowedly and constitutionally in the hands of the working classes, it would be understood that the higher traders had no voice. Those of them—and they are a very large number—who have none now would be great gainers, because they would no longer have the vexation of being thought to sympathise with persons to whom they are emphatically opposed. The reason is different with respect to the prevailing party in those boroughs, but the conclusion is the same. So far are Mr. Bright's followers from protesting against the wholesale admission of the class of voters just below them, that they are clamorous in favour of that admission. If the adoption of a rate-paying franchise is supported by any part of the country, it is by the constituencies of the very largest towns. There is no hardship in giving to them the boon which they demand for every one.

If, however, it should be found that the higher classes of the largest towns exceedingly disliked the evident disfranchisement which would be the certain consequence of extending the borough franchise in such towns to the lower orders, it would not be by any means impossible to find practicable plans of preserving to them an effectual franchise. The first of these plans is the creation of what may be called *suburban* constituencies. The greater part of our merchants and traders, even the higher part of our shopkeepers, have long since deserted the straitened dwellings over the shop and the counting-house which contented their fathers. They have residences in country districts near their places of business; all round our largest cities there is a network of them. Many constituencies could be found in the environs of our great cities where the

rich, comfortable, and intellectual business classes reside in very great numbers, and where they would be far more likely to predominate, and to have an effectual voice in the selection of members of Parliament, than under the present suffrage system they are, or can be, in the great seats of industry themselves. Such classes would benefit exceedingly by conceding to the working classes the undisputed command of the representation of the great town itself, if they could thereby obtain a real representation for themselves at their own homes. That which they have now—so numerous are the meaner householders—is rather a vexing mockery than a desirable reality; what they would obtain would be a substantial and effectual influence on the legislature. If it were necessary, it would be easy to provide that the representation should be really in the hands of the higher class by fixing the property qualification for a vote at a higher point than usual (at £20, suppose); but I rather apprehend that this expedient, though quite defensible, and by no means intrinsically undesirable, would not be absolutely necessary, as the number of the higher classes residing in well-selected suburban constituencies would give them, under a ten-pound franchise, an effectual superiority.

A second plan, which is not inconsistent with the first, but rather supplementary to it, is a development of the suggestion that personal property should be made the basis and criterion of a qualification as well as real property. The first step to carry this into practice raises the question: for what constituency is this qualification to give a vote? Railway debentures and the public funds have no locality; if they are to give a vote, they may do so for one place as well as for another. I would propose to give the voter himself a choice on this point. If he had the power of registering himself on the ground of a monied-property qualification within a certain circle of constituencies—say to any one situated at not more than fifty miles from his usual place of abode—he could transfer his vote to that one where it was most wanted, and would be most effectual. The higher classes in the largest constituencies—practically disfranchised as they almost are now, and as they would be quite if the suggestions I have ventured to make

were adopted—might find a satisfactory refuge in the smaller constituencies of the neighbourhood, whose numbers they would augment, and whose composition they would materially improve. In general, too, the creation of a *transferable* constituency, by conferring the suffrage on the possessors of non-local wealth *as such*, would be a material strengthening of the educated classes as opposed to the non-educated, because it would give the former an opportunity of concentrating their power where it would tell most, while the power of the lower classes would be dispersed, and inseparably attached to certain places.

Both of these are expedients for giving to the disfranchised upper classes of the most numerous constituencies power *elsewhere* than in these constituencies; two other expedients may be mentioned, by which they might still retain considerable influence *in* them.

The first of these is a modification of the "minority principle". It has been shown in the preceding essay, by arguments which are to my own mind conclusive, that this ingenious expedient would not of itself solve the problem of giving to the working classes a certain number of spokesmen in Parliament without conferring on them the supreme authority in the State. The working classes are the enormous majority in the country; if the franchise is universally lowered so as to include them in every constituency, they will be masters of the country. By means of the minority principle a certain power may be preserved to some fraction more or less of the constituency, according to circumstances; but the great preponderance will be with the majority still. In the case usually supposed of a constituency with three members, in which each constituent has nevertheless but two votes, a minority at all greater than two-fifths of the constituency could return one member, if they pleased it, with complete certainty; but the corresponding majority of a trifle less than three-fifths would return two members with equal certainty. The influence of the majority would still be double the influence of the minority. So far from this principle giving to the working classes a few members and no more, it gives the greater number to them,

and only a few in comparison to the rich. But though this expedient does not of itself give the solution of the problem of which we are in search, it gives us the means of alleviating the inconvenience attaching to what we have found to be one solution of that problem. We may by means of the minority principle give a voice to the rich in the exceptional constituencies in which it has been proposed to lower the franchise so as to include the working men. In these constituencies we only wish to give the rich *some* power; it is the principle of the proposal to give the greater power to their inferiors.

One of the modes in which the minority principle might be made use of for this purpose has an appearance of equality which would be, I should imagine, attractive to consistent democrats. It is proposed that, no matter what the number of members for the constituency may be, no elector shall have more than one vote. As has been previously pointed out, this is by far the most efficacious form of the minority principle, because the minority to which it gives a member is smaller than it is under any other modification of that principle. If there were only two members for a constituency, a minority at all exceeding one-third might be certain of returning a single member. I cannot, indeed, imagine that in this form the principle could ever be adopted or even seriously advocated. No one would say that one-third *plus* one of the nation was entitled to as much voice in its deliberations and decisions as two-thirds *minus* one of it. A small minority, as such, and no matter how composed, could never claim to have as much power as a large majority, the members of which might, for aught which appears, be equally intelligent. Nor, even if we supposed the minority to be the rich and educated, and the majority the poor and ignorant, would the result be satisfactory. The error would then be in the other direction: the ignorant majority would in that case have as much power as the instructed minority, which is exactly what we desire that they should not have. Like all other modifications of the minority principle, this one fails as an anti-democratic expedient applicable to the whole country. It would be most dangerous to lower very greatly the franchise throughout the

country, in reliance on its efficacy in precluding a despotism of the uneducated. But if the franchise be only extended to the working classes in certain exceptional constituencies, the adoption of the rule that no elector should have more than a single vote might in them be very beneficial. Suppose that three members were assigned to such constituencies, and that no elector possessed more than a single vote, a moderate fraction (one-fourth of the constituency *plus* one) could always be sure of returning a member, and the remaining part of the constituency (three-fourths *minus* one) would return the other two. If the higher classes of a great town were really united, and used their legitimate influence with zeal, they could always command somewhat more than a quarter of the constituency: they would be secure of returning a representative to the legislature as well as their inferiors.

The same end would be reached by the adoption of what is called the "cumulative vote" in these exceptional constituencies. By this is simply meant that the elector should be permitted to give all his votes to a single member if he pleases: thus, if the members to be elected for the constituency be three, and each elector have three votes, he would be enabled to give all his votes to any one candidate, instead of being compelled, as at present, either to distribute them among three candidates, or abstain from using some of them. By means of this expedient also, a minority at all greater than one-quarter could with certainty return a member; and the effect in that respect would be of course the same as if that result had been attained by the other expedient. I cannot but think, however, that the latter mode is very preferable in other respects. Mr. J. S. Mill says very justly that the principle of giving the elector fewer votes than there are members to be elected must always be unpopular, "because it cuts down the privileges of the voter;" while, on the other hand, the adoption of the cumulative vote increases them, and has in consequence a tendency to be popular. Mr. Mill justly observes also that the expedient of the "cumulative vote" has another great advantage: it enables voters to indicate not only their preference for a candidate, but the degree of their preference. Instead of voting

mechanically for all the candidates put forward by their party, it enables them to select the one whom they really themselves most approve, and to support him only. This would tend to secure to eminent and trusted statesmen a secure position in their respective constituencies, which is one of the most important among the minor excellences of a representative system.

By one or other of these two schemes, it would be possible to give a real representation to the working classes in the large towns in which they live, and to preserve a portion of influence and a share in the local representation to the higher classes of the town. Both schemes are, however, liable to the very considerable objection that they permit, or rather provide for, the election in the same place of a member for the poor and a member for the rich, which is very likely to cause local ill-feeling, and may sometimes irritate the poor into momentary turbulence. On this ground, it seems to me preferable that the higher classes in the large towns should be content with such indirect compensation for their local disfranchisement as would be afforded by the two plans which were noticed first. But popular impression has an incalculable influence in such questions; and if the higher classes in these first-class constituencies would feel it a stigma or an injustice to have no share in their local representation, such a share must be reserved to them, although we are thereby compelled to allow of the election of two contrasted kinds of members for the same town.

It may likewise be objected to the creation of such exceptional constituencies as I have proposed, that their exceptional character could not be permanent. If you once lower the qualification in one constituency, it may be said there will be no rest from agitation until it has been lowered to the same extreme point in all constituencies. But this appears to me to assume that the democratic tendencies of the country are far more powerful than they really are. The extension of the suffrage, especially a very large extension of it, is not very popular with the existing constituencies. If we give to such privileged bodies a good argumentative defence, the oligarchical tendencies of human nature will go far to ensure their maintaining their privileges. Nothing tends to the longevity of a

public benefit so much as its being also a particular private advantage to some one who will look after it. Such a defence the existing constituencies will really have if we assign to the working classes some real representation in Parliament; but while the most numerous class have no means at all of making their voice heard, there will always be an uneasy feeling that they are unduly depressed and unfeelingly disregarded. So far, then, from the creation of exceptional constituencies tending to weaken the arguments in favour of the general structure of the present constituencies, it is the only way of removing the most telling argumentative objection to our existing arrangements.

An exceptional character in particular constituencies is, it should be observed, an essential element in every system of *class* representation. If you lay down the principle that there shall be persons in Parliament qualified and authorised to speak the sentiments of special classes, you must take care that in certain electoral bodies those classes shall predominate, that the member for such bodies shall be their member. You can only secure speciality in the member by a speciality in the constituency. This is the very ground on which borough populations were originally selected for a separate representation. It was believed that places differing so much from the rural districts in which they were situated would have distinct interests to advocate, distinct opinions to maintain, possibly distinct grievances to state. In a word, it was believed that they would send a special representative, with something to say different from that which an ordinary county representative would ever say. By selecting for particular representation towns occupied in all the important kinds of trade, we have secured an expression to the opinions and sentiments of all kinds of capitalists. By giving special representatives to the Universities, we have provided, perhaps not adequately, but still to some extent, for the characteristic expression of the peculiar views of the cultured classes. I believe that the principle of special representation should be extended to the lower classes also, who, from an improvement in education, have now in the larger towns opinions to state, and perhaps, in their own esti-

mation, grievances to make known. If a special representation is given to such persons, it can only be in the same way that special representatives are given to other classes by creating constituencies with a corresponding speciality.

It is to be observed, that the necessity for creating such exceptional constituencies would not be obviated by the recommendation which Mr. Mill has made of giving one vote to every man, whatever be his education, and additional votes in a rapidly-ascending scale to persons of greater education. The object of this recommendation is to keep the principal authority in the State in the hands of educated men. The scale of votes is avowedly arranged for that purpose. By the adoption of this scheme, you would give to the working classes no characteristic expression in the legislature; you would give them an influence in every constituency in appearance considerable, but which would be of no practical avail to them as a class, because on all characteristic points their voice would be neutralised, and whenever there were class candidates theirs would be rejected, by the more numerous votes given for that very purpose to the more educated classes.

I must have wearied every reader with this part of the subject; and my only excuse is the strong conviction which I feel of its importance, and my wish not to omit to make any observation which may serve to throw it into what seems to me the true light.

As far as the nomination boroughs go, I have no wish to say a word in their defence. In former times there may have been a certain advantage in the existence of such seats. Young men of promise were then occasionally brought into Parliament by the patrons of such constituencies, and great statesmen sometimes found a refuge in them during moments of unpopularity. But these advantages belong to past times. Before the Reform Act of 1832 the borough proprieters had boroughs to spare; such was the plenty of such seats, that there were some left for the public, after providing for the relations and personal friends of the proprietor. But the fact is otherwise at present. There are not now enough of such boroughs to provide for the personal connections of those who

own them; and the public derive almost no advantage from their continuance.

As I have explained, all very small boroughs tend to become either dependent or corrupt, and therefore all very small ones should be abolished. But this is no ground for abolishing a great number of constituencies which, though not very large, are still large enough to be fairly independent and fairly uncorrupt. There can be no ground for disfranchising every place which has not 10,000 inhabitants. If we look to abstract principle as our guide, no measure would be more undesirable. We have seen it to be desirable not only that there should be special representatives for every class in Parliament, but likewise that the predominant tone and temper of Parliament should be despotically controlled by no class or sect of persons—that it should coincide with the feeling of the nation itself. The accordance of the opinion of Parliament with that of the country is the principal condition for the performance by Parliament of its great function of ruling the country. This can only be secured by the continuance in Parliament of many members representing no special interest, bound down to state the ideas of no particular class, themselves not markedly exhibiting the characteristics of any particular *status*, but able to form a judgment of what is good for the country as freely and impartially as other educated men. It is impossible to expect that such persons will be commonly sent to Parliament by the counties and the large towns. A good deal has already been said of the *sectarian* character of the county members. I fear it must be allowed that the better class of members for large towns are at least as sectarian; they are capitalists, men of business, representing the views and opinions of the ten-pound householders. I am not speaking of such members as stray in occasionally for such constituencies as the Tower Hamlets. A low class of demagogue will now and then be returned by every very large constituency; but the characteristic tendency of the large towns is to return men of business of mature age, and of a certain very recognisable, if not very describable tendency of sentiment and opinion—a kind of member as marked, as

peculiar, and as distinct from all others as any county member can be. I cannot but think that we shall impair the proper working of our Parliamentary constitution if we greatly augment the number of class representatives, whether for the large towns or the counties. Whatever other defects may be alleged to exist in the smaller boroughs, the objection that they return exclusively the representatives of a class cannot be made to them. Every species of member sits for some of them. A list of persons more unlike one another could hardly be found than the list of the representatives for our smaller boroughs. When we consider how exceedingly important it is that the judgment of Parliament should be alloyed by no class prejudice or class interest, that its decisions should be in accordance with the real and deliberate decision of the nation, we shall, I hope, pause before we abolish constituencies so likely to contribute to effect this result. It is not possible for human skill to apportion to each special interest the exact number of representatives which it ought to have, and to compose a Parliament exclusively of such special representatives. It would require more skill than any statesman can claim to establish a coincidence of opinion between Parliament and the country solely by the definite allotment of particular members to particular classes. There is no criterion to tell us with accuracy how much each class contributes to the formation of public opinion. The sole expedient for securing the result which we wish to obtain, is that by which it has actually been obtained. We have a Parliament, subject to two slight objections, fairly coincident in judgment with the reflecting part of the community. This inestimable coincidence of judgment is largely due to the immemorial existence of very many impartial constituencies. We have class advocates in Parliament, it is true; but many unbiassed judges, many national representatives, are to be found there likewise. Perhaps no course could be more dangerous for the country than to diminish the number of the latter, and so lose, possibly at a very critical moment, the incalculable benefit of their impartial intelligence.

JOHN MILTON.[1]

(1859.)

THE *Life of Milton*, by Professor Masson, is a difficulty for the critics. It is very laborious, very learned, and in the main, we believe, very accurate. It is exceedingly long,—there are 780 pages in this volume, and there are to be two volumes more: it touches on very many subjects, and each of these has been investigated to the very best of the author's ability. No one can wish to speak with censure of a book on which so much genuine labour has been expended; and yet we are bound, as true critics, to say that we think it has been composed upon a principle that is utterly erroneous. In justice to ourselves we must explain our meaning.

There are two methods on which biography may consistently be written. The first of these is what we may call the exhaustive method. Every fact which is known about the hero may be told us; everything which he did, everything which he would not do, everything which other people did to him, everything which other people would not do to him,—may be narrated at full length. We may have a complete picture of all the events of his life; of all which he underwent, and all which he achieved. We may, as Mr. Carlyle expresses

[1] *The Life of John Milton, narrated in connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his time.* By David Masson, M.A., Professor of English Literature in University College, London. Cambridge: Macmillan.

An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton. By Thomas Keightley; with an Introduction to "Paradise Lost". London: Chapman and Hall.

The Poems of Milton, with Notes by Thomas Keightley. London: Chapman and Hall.

it, have a complete account "of his effect upon the universe, and of the effect of the universe upon him". We admit that biographies of this species would be very long and generally very tedious, we know that the world could not contain very many of them; but nevertheless the principle on which they may be written is intelligible.

The second method on which the life of a man may be written is the selective. Instead of telling everything, we may choose what we will tell. We may select out of the numberless events, from among the innumerable actions of his life, those events and those actions which exemplify his true character, which prove to us what were the true limits of his talents, what was the degree of his deficiencies, which were his defects, which his vices,—in a word, we may select the traits and the particulars which seem to give us the best idea of the man as he lived and as he was. On this side the flood, as Sydney Smith would have said, we should have fancied that this was the only practicable principle on which biographies can be written about persons of whom many details are recorded. For ancient heroes the exhaustive method is possible. All that can be known of them is contained in a few short passages of Greek and Latin, and it is quite possible to say whatever can be said about every one of these: the result would not be unreasonably bulky, though it might be dull. But in the case of men who have lived in the thick of the crowded modern world, no such course is admissible; overmuch *may* be said, and we must choose what we will say. Biographers, however, are rarely bold enough to adopt the selective method consistently. They have, we suspect, the fear of the critics before their eyes. They do not like that it should be said that "the work of the learned gentleman contains serious omissions: the events of 1562 are not mentioned; those of October, 1579, are narrated but very cursorily": and we fear that in any case such remarks will be made. Very learned people are pleased to show that they know what is *not* in the book; sometimes they may hint that perhaps the author did not know it, or surely he would have mentioned it. But a biographer who wishes to write what most people of

cultivation will be pleased to read must be courageous enough to face the pain of such censures. He must choose, as we have explained, the characteristic parts of his subject; and all that he has to take care of besides, is so to narrate them that their characteristic elements shall be shown: to give such an account of the general career as may make it clear what these chosen events really were; to show their respective bearings to one another; to delineate what is expressive in such a manner as to make it expressive.

This plan of biography is, however, by no means that of Mr. Masson. He has no dread of overgrown bulk and overwhelming copiousness. He finds, indeed, what we have called the exhaustive method insufficient. He not only wishes to narrate in full the life of Milton, but to add those of his contemporaries likewise: he seems to wish to tell us not only what Milton did, but also what every one else did in Great Britain during his lifetime. He intends his book to be not "merely a biography of Milton, but also in some sort a continuous history of his time. . . . The suggestions of Milton's life have indeed determined the tracks of these historical researches and expositions, sometimes through the literature of the period, sometimes through its civil and ecclesiastical politics; but the extent to which I have pursued them, and the space which I have assigned to them, have been determined by my desire to present, by their combination, something like a connected historical view of British thought and British society in general prior to the Revolution." We need not do more than observe that this union of heterogeneous aims must always end, as it has in this case, in the production of a work at once overgrown and incomplete. A great deal which has only a slight bearing on the character of Milton is inserted; much that is necessary to a true history of "British thought and British society" is of necessity left out. The period of Milton's life which is included in the published volume makes the absurdity especially apparent. In middle life Milton was a great controversialist on contemporary topics; and though it would not be proper for a biographer to load his pages with a full account of all such controversies, yet some notice of the most characteristic

of them would be expected from him. In this part of Milton's life some reference to public events would be necessary; and we should not severely censure a biographer, if the great interest of those events induced him to stray a little from his topic. But the first thirty years of Milton's life require a very different treatment. He passed those years in the ordinary musings of a studious and meditative youth; it was the period of "Lycidas" and of "Comus"; he then dreamed the

> "Sights which youthful poets dream
> On summer eve by haunted stream".[1]

We do not wish to have this part of his life disturbed, to a greater extent than may be necessary, with the harshness of public affairs. Nor is it necessary that it should be so disturbed. A life of poetic retirement requires but little reference to anything except itself. In a biography of Mr. Tennyson we should not expect to hear of the Reform Bill, or the Corn Laws. Mr. Masson is, however, of a different opinion. He thinks it necessary to tell us, not only all which Milton did, but everything also that he might have heard of.

The biography of Mr. Keightley is on a very different scale. He tells the story of Milton's career in about half a small volume. Probably this is a little too concise, and the narrative is somewhat dry and bare. It is often, however, acute, and is always clear; and even were its defects greater than they are, we should think it unseemly to criticise the last work of one who has performed so many useful services to literature with extreme severity.

The bare outline of Milton's life is very well known. We have all heard that he was born in the latter years of King James, just when Puritanism was collecting its strength for the approaching struggle; that his father and mother were quiet good people, inclined, but not immoderately, to that persuasion; that he went up to Cambridge early, and had some kind of dissension with the authorities there; that the

[1] "L'Allegro."

course of his youth was in a singular degree pure and staid; that in boyhood he was a devourer of books, and that he early became, and always remained, a severely studious man; that he married, and had difficulties of a peculiar character with his first wife; that he wrote on Divorce; that after the death of his first wife, he married a second time a lady who died very soon, and a third time a person who survived him more than fifty years; that he wrote early poems of singular beauty, which we still read; that he travelled in Italy, and exhibited his learning in the academies there; that he plunged deep in the theological and political controversies of his time; that he kept a school, or rather, in our more modern phrase, took pupils; that he was a republican of a peculiar kind, and of "no Church," which Dr. Johnson thought dangerous; that he was Secretary for Foreign Languages under the Long Parliament, and retained that office after the *coup d'état* of Cromwell; that he defended the death of Charles I., and became blind from writing a book in haste upon that subject; that after the Restoration he was naturally in a position of some danger and much difficulty; that in the midst of that difficulty he wrote "Paradise Lost"; that he did not fail in "heart or hope,"[1] but lived for fourteen years after the destruction of all for which he had laboured, in serene retirement, "though fallen on evil days, though fallen on evil times";—all this we have heard from our boyhood. How much is wanting to complete the picture—how many traits, both noble and painful, might be recovered from the past—we shall never know, till some biographer skilled in interpreting the details of human nature shall select this subject for his art.

All that we can hope to do in an essay like this is, to throw together some miscellaneous remarks on the character of the Puritan poet, and on the peculiarities of his works; and if in any part of them we may seem to make unusual criticisms, and to be over-ready with depreciation or objection, our excuse must be that we wish to paint a likeness, and that the harsher features of the subject should have a prominence, even in an outline.

[1] Sonnet xix.

There are two kinds of goodness conspicuous in the world, and often made the subject of contrast there; for which, however, we seem to want exact words, and which we are obliged to describe rather vaguely and incompletely. These characters may in one aspect be called the sensuous and the ascetic. The character of the first is that which is almost personified in the poet-king of Israel, whose actions and whose history have been "improved" so often by various writers, that it now seems trite even to allude to them. Nevertheless, the particular virtues and the particular career of David seem to embody the idea of what may be called sensuous goodness far more completely than a living being in general comes near to an abstract idea. There may have been shades in the actual man which would have modified the resemblance; but in the portrait which has been handed down to us, the traits are perfect and the approximation exact. The principle of this character is its sensibility to outward stimulus; it is moved by all which occurs, stirred by all which happens, open to the influences of whatever it sees, hears, or meets with. The certain consequence of this mental constitution is a peculiar liability to temptation. Men are, according to the divine, "put upon their trial through the senses". It is through the constant suggestions of the outer world that our minds are stimulated, that our will has the chance of a choice, that moral life becomes possible. The sensibility to this external stimulus brings with it, when men have it to excess, an unusual access of moral difficulty. Everything acts on them, and everything has a chance of turning them aside; the most tempting things act upon them very deeply, and their influence, in consequence, is extreme. Naturally, therefore, the errors of such men are great. We need not point the moral—

> "Dizzied faith and guilt and woe,
> Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
> Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
> Sated power's tyrannic mood,
> Counsels shared with men of blood,
> Sad success, parental tears,
> And a dreary gift of years".[1]

[1] John Henry Newman's "Call of David".

But, on the other hand, the excellence of such men has a charm, a kind of sensuous sweetness, that is its own. Being conscious of frailty, they are tender to the imperfect; being sensitive to this world, they sympathise with the world; being familiar with all the moral incidents of life, their goodness has a richness and a complication: they fascinate their own age, and in their deaths they are "not divided" from the love of others. Their peculiar sensibility gives a depth to their religion; it is at once deeper and more human than that of other men. As their sympathetic knowledge of those whom they have seen is great, so it is with their knowledge of Him whom they have not seen; and as is their knowledge, so is their love; it is deep, from their nature; rich and intimate, from the variety of their experience; chastened by the ever-present sense of their weakness and of its consequences.

In extreme opposition to this is the ascetic species of goodness. This is not, as is sometimes believed, a self-produced ideal—a simply voluntary result of discipline and restraint. Some men have by nature what others have to elaborate by effort. Some men have a repulsion from the world. All of us have, in some degree, a protective instinct; an impulse, that is to say, to start back from what may trouble us, to shun what may fascinate us, to avoid what may tempt us. On the moral side of human nature this preventive check is occasionally imperious; it holds the whole man under its control,—makes him recoil from the world, be offended at its amusements, be repelled by its occupations, be scared by its sins. The consequences of this tendency, when it is thus in excess, upon the character are very great and very singular. It secludes a man in a sort of natural monastery; he lives in a kind of moral solitude; and the effects of his isolation for good and for evil on his disposition are very many. The best result is a singular capacity for meditative religion. Being aloof from what is earthly, such persons are shut up with what is spiritual; being unstirred by the incidents of time, they are alone with the eternal; rejecting this life, they are alone with what is beyond. According to the

measure of their minds, men of this removed and secluded excellence become eminent for a settled and brooding piety, for a strong and predominant religion. In human life too, in a thousand ways, their isolated excellence is apparent. They walk through the whole of it with an abstinence from sense, a zeal of morality, a purity of ideal, which other men have not. Their religion has an imaginative grandeur, and their life something of an unusual impeccability. And these are obviously singular excellences. But the deficiencies to which the same character tends are equally singular. In the first place, their isolation gives them a certain pride in themselves, and an inevitable ignorance of others. They are secluded by their constitutional δαίμων from life; they are repelled from the pursuits which others care for; they are alarmed at the amusements which others enjoy. In consequence, they trust in their own thoughts; they come to magnify both them and themselves—for being able to think and to retain them. The greater the nature of the man, the greater is this temptation. His thoughts are greater, and, in consequence, the greater is his tendency to prize them, the more extreme is his tendency to overrate them. This pride, too, goes side by side with a want of sympathy. Being aloof from others, such a mind is unlike others; and it feels, and sometimes it feels bitterly, its own unlikeness. Generally, however, it is too wrapt up in its own exalted thoughts to be sensible of the pain of moral isolation; it stands apart from others, unknowing and unknown. It is deprived of moral experience in two ways,—it is not tempted itself, and it does not comprehend the temptations of others. And this defect of moral experience is almost certain to produce two effects, one practical and the other speculative. When such a man is wrong, he will be apt to believe that he is right. If his own judgment err, he will not have the habit of checking it by the judgment of others; he will be accustomed to think most men wrong; differing from them would be no proof of error, agreeing with them would rather be a basis for suspicion. He may, too, be very wrong, for the conscience of no man is perfect on all sides. The strange-

ness of secluded excellence will be sometimes deeply shaded by very strange errors. To be commonly above others, still more to think yourself above others, is to be below them every now and then, and sometimes much below. Again, on the speculative side, this defect of moral experience penetrates into the distinguishing excellence of the character,—its brooding and meditative religion. Those who see life under only one aspect, can see religion under only one likewise. This world is needful to interpret what is beyond; the seen must explain the unseen. It is from a tried and a varied and a troubled moral life that the deepest and truest idea of God arises. The ascetic character wants these; therefore in its religion there will be a harshness of outline, a bareness, so to say, as well as a grandeur. In life we may look for a singular purity; but also, and with equal probability, for singular self-confidence, a certain unsympathising straitness, and perhaps a few singular errors.

The character of the ascetic, or austere species of goodness, is almost exactly embodied in Milton. Men, indeed, are formed on no ideal type. Human nature has tendencies too various, and circumstances too complex. All men's characters have sides and aspects not to be comprehended in a single definition; but in this case, the extent to which the character of the man, as we find it delineated, approaches to the moral abstraction which we sketch from theory, is remarkable. The whole being of Milton may, in some sort, be summed up in the great commandment of the austere character, "Reverence thyself". We find it expressed in almost every one of his singular descriptions of himself,—of those striking passages which are scattered through all his works, and which add to whatever interest may intrinsically belong to them one of the rarest of artistic charms, that of magnanimous autobiography. They have been quoted a thousand times, but one of them may perhaps be quoted again. "I had my time, readers, as others have, who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places, where the opinion was it might be soonest attained; and as the manner is, was not unstudied in those

authors which are most commended; whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome: for that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be less severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye. Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections, which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises: for albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle; yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious. Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred: whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect is wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour

of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."[1]

It may be fanciful to add, and we may be laughed at, but we believe that the self-reverencing propensity was a little aided by his singular personal beauty. All the describers of his youth concur in telling us that this was very remarkable. Mr. Masson has the following account of it:—

"When Milton left Cambridge in July, 1632, he was twenty-three years and eight months old. In stature, therefore, at least, he was already whatever he was to be. 'In stature,' he says himself at a latter period, when driven to speak on the subject, 'I confess I am not tall, but still of what is nearer to middle height than to little: and what if I were of little; of which stature have often been very great men both in peace and war—though why should that be called little which is great enough for virtue?' (*'Staturâ, fateor, non sum procerâ, sed quæ mediocri tamen quàm parvæ propior sit; sed quid si parvâ, quâ et summi sæpe tum pace tum bello viri fuere—quanquam parva cur dicitur, quæ ad virtutem satis magna est?*"). This is precise enough; but we have Aubrey's words to the same effect: 'He was scarce so tall as I am,' says Aubrey; to which, to make it more intelligible, he appends the marginal note:—'*Qu. Quot* feet I am high? *Resp.* Of middle stature;'—*i.e.*, Milton was a little under middle height. 'He had light brown hair,' continues Aubrey,—putting the word 'abrown' ('auburn') in the margin by way of synonym for 'light brown';—'his complexion exceeding fair; oval face; his eye a dark grey.'"

We are far from accusing Milton of personal vanity. His character was too enormous, if we may be allowed so to say, for a fault so petty. But a little tinge of excessive self-respect will cling to those who can admire themselves. Ugly men are and ought to be ashamed of their existence. Milton was not so.

The peculiarities of the austere type of character stand

[1] *Apology for Smectymnuus.*

out in Milton more remarkably than in other men who partake of it, because of the extreme strength of his nature. In reading him this is the first thing that strikes us. We seem to have left the little world of ordinary writers. The words of some authors are said to have "hands and feet"; they seem, that is, to have a vigour and animation which only belong to things which live and move. Milton's words have not this animal life. There is no rude energy about them. But, on the other hand, they have, or seem to have, a soul, a spirit which other words have not. He was early aware that what he wrote, "by certain vital signs it had," was such as the world would not "willingly let die".[1] After two centuries we feel the same. There is a solemn and firm music in the lines; a brooding sublimity haunts them; the spirit of the great writer moves over the face of the page. In life there seems to have been the same peculiar strength that his works suggest to us. His moral tenacity is amazing. He took his own course, and he kept his own course; and we may trace in his defects the same characteristics. "Energy and ill-temper," some say, "are the same thing;" and though this is a strong exaggeration, yet there is a basis of truth in it. People who labour much will be cross if they do not obtain that for which they labour; those who desire vehemently will be vexed if they do not obtain that which they desire. As is the strength of the impelling tendency, so, other things being equal, is the pain which it will experience if it be baffled. Those, too, who are set on what is high will be proportionately offended by the intrusion of what is low. Accordingly, Milton is described by those who knew him as a "harsh and choleric man". "He had," we are told, "a gravity in his temper, not melancholy, or not till the latter part of his life,—not sour, not morose, not ill-natured; but a certain severity of mind, not condescending to little things;"—and this, although his daughter remembered that he was delightful company, the life of conversation, and that he was so "on account of a flow of subjects and an unaffected cheerfulness

[1] *Reason of Church Government*, Introduction to book iii.

and civility". Doubtless this may have been so when he was at ease, and at home. But there are unmistakable traces of the harsher tendency in almost all his works.

Some of the peculiarities of the ascetic character were likewise augmented by his studious disposition. This began very early in life, and continued till the end. "My father," he says, "destined me to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the twelfth year of my age I hardly ever retired to rest from my studies till midnight; which was the first source of injury to my eyes, to the natural weakness of which were added frequent headaches: all of which not retarding my eagerness after knowledge, he took care to have me instructed,"[1] etc. Every page of his works shows the result of this education. In spite of the occupations of manhood, and the blindness and melancholy of old age, he still continued to have his principal pleasure in that "studious and select" reading, which, though often curiously transmuted, is perpetually involved in the very texture of his works. We need not stay to observe how a habit in itself so austere conduces to the development of an austere character. Deep study, especially deep study which haunts and rules the imagination, necessarily removes men from life, absorbs them in themselves; purifies their conduct, with some risk of isolating their sympathies; develops that loftiness of mood which is gifted with deep inspirations and indulged with great ideas, but which tends in its excess to engender a contempt for others, and a self-appreciation which is even more displeasing to them.

These same tendencies were aggravated also by two defects which are exceedingly rare in great English authors, and which perhaps Milton alone amongst those of the highest class is in a remarkable degree chargeable with. We mean a deficiency in humour, and a deficiency in a knowledge of plain human nature. Probably when, after the lapse of ages, English literature is looked at in its larger features only, and in comparison with other literatures which have preceded or which may follow

[1] *Defensio Secunda;* translated by Keightley.

it, the critics will lay down that its most striking characteristic as a whole is its involution, so to say, in life; the degree to which its book life resembles real life; the extent to which the motives, dispositions, and actions of common busy persons are represented in a medium which would seem likely to give us peculiarly the ideas of secluded, and the tendencies of meditative men. It is but an aspect of this fact, that English literature abounds,—some critics will say abounds excessively,—with humour. This is in some sense the imaginative element of ordinary life,—the relieving charm, partaking at once of contrast and similitude, which gives a human and an intellectual interest to the world of clowns and cottages, of fields and farmers. The degree to which Milton is deficient in this element is conspicuous in every page of his writings where its occurrence could be looked for; and if we do not always look for it, that is because the subjects of his most remarkable works are on a removed elevation, where ordinary life, the world of "cakes and ale," is never thought of and never expected. It is in his dramas, as we should expect, that Milton shows this deficiency the most. "Citizens" never talk in his pages, as they do in Shakespeare. We feel instinctively that Milton's eye had never rested with the same easy pleasure on the easy, ordinary, shop-keeping world. Perhaps, such is the complication of art, that it is on the most tragic occasions that we felt this want the most. It may seem an odd theory, and yet we believe it to be a true principle, that catastrophes require a comic element. We appear to feel the same principle in life. We may read solemn descriptions of great events in history,—say of Lord Strafford's trial, and of his marvellous speech, and his appeal to his "saint in heaven"; but we comprehend the whole transaction much better when we learn from Mr. Baillie, the eye-witness, that people ate nuts and apples, and talked, and laughed and betted on the great question of acquittal and condemnation. Nor is it difficult to understand why this should be so. It seems to be a law of the imagination, at least in most men, that it will not bear concentration. It is essentially a glancing faculty. It goes and comes, and comes and goes, and we hardly know whence

or why. But we most of us know that when we try to fix it, in a moment it passes away. Accordingly, the proper procedure of art is to let it go in such a manner as to ensure its coming back again. The force of artistic contrasts effects exactly this result. Skilfully disposed opposites suggest the notion of each other. We realise more perfectly and easily the great idea, the tragic conception, when we are familiarised with its effects on the minds of little people, —with the petty consequences which it causes, as well as with the enormous forces from which it comes. The catastrophe of Samson Agonistes discloses Milton's imperfect mastery of this element of effect. If ever there was an occasion which admitted its perfect employment, it was this. The kind of catastrophe is exactly that which is sure to strike and strike forcibly the minds of common persons. If their observations on the occasion were really given to us, we could scarcely avoid something rather comic. The eccentricity, so to speak, of ordinary persons, shows itself peculiarly at such times, and they say the queerest things. Shakespeare has exemplified this principle most skilfully on various occasions: it is the sort of art which is just in his way. His imagination always seems to be floating between the contrasts of things; and if his mind had a resting-place that it liked, it was this ordinary view of extraordinary events. Milton was under the great obligation to use this relieving principle of art in the catastrophe of Samson, because he has made every effort to heighten the strictly tragic element, which requires that relief. His art, always serious, was never more serious. His Samson is not the incarnation of physical strength which the popular fancy embodies in the character; nor is it the simple and romantic character of the Old Testament. On the contrary, Samson has become a Puritan: the observations he makes would have done much credit to a religious pikeman in Cromwell's army. In consequence, his death requires some lightening touches to make it a properly artistic event. The pomp of seriousness becomes too oppressive.

"At length for intermission sake they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard),
As over-tired, to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy pillars
That to the archèd roof gave main support.
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fix'd, he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:
At last with head erect thus cry'd aloud,
'Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld:
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater,
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.'
This utter'd, straining all his nerves he bow'd,
As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro.
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them, with bursts of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,—
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnise this feast.
Samson with these immix'd, inevitably
Pull'd down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only 'scaped who stood without.
Chor. O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now ly'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd
Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes, in number more
Than all thy life hath slain before."

This is grave and fine; but Shakespeare would have done it differently and better.

We need not pause to observe how certainly this deficiency in humour and in the delineation of ordinary human feeling is

connected with a recluse, a solitary, and to some extent an unsympathising life. If we combine a certain aloofness from common men with literary habits and an incessantly studious musing, we shall at once see how powerful a force is brought to bear on an instinctively austere character, and how sure it will be to develop the peculiar tendencies of it, both good and evil. It was to no purpose that Milton seems to have practised a sort of professional study of life. No man could rank more highly the importance to a poet of an intellectual insight into all-important pursuits and "seemly arts". But it is not by the mere intellect that we can take in the daily occupations of mankind; we must sympathise with them, and see them in their human relations. A chimney-sweeper, *qud* chimney-sweeper, is not very sentimental; it is in himself that he is so interesting.

Milton's austere character is in some sort the more evident, because he possessed in large measure a certain relieving element, in which those who are eminent in that character are very deficient. Generally such persons have but obtuse senses. We are prone to attribute the purity of their conduct to the dulness of their sensations. Milton had no such obtuseness. He had every opportunity for knowing "the world of eye and ear".[1] You cannot open his works without seeing how much he did know of it. The austerity of his nature was not caused by the deficiency of his senses, but by an excess of the warning instinct. Even when he professed to delineate the world of sensuous delight, this instinct shows itself. Dr. Johnson thought he could discern melancholy in "L'Allegro".[2] If he had said solitariness, it would have been correct.

The peculiar nature of Milton's character is very conspicuous in the events of his domestic life, and in the views which he took of the great public revolutions of his age. We can spare only a very brief space for the examination of either of these; but we will endeavour to say a few words upon each of them.

The circumstances of Milton's first marriage are as singular as any in the strange series of the loves of the poets. The

[1] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey". [2] *Life of Milton.*

scene opens with an affair of business. Milton's father, as is well known, was a scrivener, a kind of professional money-lender, then well known in London; and having been early connected with the vicinity of Oxford, continued afterwards to have pecuniary transactions of a certain nature with country gentlemen of that neighbourhood. In the course of these he advanced £500 to a certain Mr. Richard Powell, a squire of fair landed estate, residing at Forest Hill, which is about four miles from the city of Oxford. The money was lent on the 11th of June, 1627; and a few months afterwards Mr. Milton the elder gave £312 of it to his son the poet, who was then a youth at college, and made a formal memorandum of the same in the form then usual, which still exists. The debt was never wholly discharged; for in 1651 we find Milton declaring on oath that he had never received more than £180, "in part satisfaction of his said just and principal debt, with damages for the same and his costs of suit". Mr. Keightley supposes him to have "taken many a ride over to Forest Hill" after he left Cambridge and was living at Horton, which is not very far distant; but of course this is only conjecture. We only know that about 1643 "he took," as his nephew relates, "a journey into the country, nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was more than a journey of recreation. After a month's stay he returns a married man, who set out a bachelor; his wife being Mary, the eldest daughter of Mr. Richard Powell, then a justice of the peace" for the county of Oxford. The suddenness of the event is rather striking; but Philips was at the time one of Milton's pupils, and it is possible that some pains may have been taken to conceal the love-affair from the "young gentlemen". Still, as Philips was Milton's nephew, he was likely to hear such intelligence tolerably early; and as he does not seem to have done so, the *dénouement* was probably rather prompt. At any rate, he was certainly married at that time, and took his bride home to his house in Aldersgate Street; and there was feasting and gaiety according to the usual custom of such events. A few weeks after, the lady went home to her friends, in which there was of course nothing remarkable; but it is singular that when

the natural limit of her visit at home was come, she absolutely refused to return to her husband. The grounds of so strange a resolution are very difficult to ascertain. Political feeling ran very high: old Mr. Powell adhered to the side of the king, and Milton to that of the Parliament; and this might be fancied to have caused an estrangement. But on the other hand, these circumstances must have been well known three months before. Nothing had happened in that quarter of a year to change very materially the position of the two parties in the State. Some other cause for Mrs. Milton's conduct must be looked for. She herself is said to have stated that she did not like her husband's "spare diet and hard study".[1] No doubt, too, she found it dull in London; she had probably always lived in the country, and must have been quite unaccustomed to the not very pleasant scene in which she found herself. Still, many young ladies have married schoolmasters, and many young ladies have gone from Oxfordshire to London; and nevertheless, no such dissolution of matrimonial harmony is known to have occurred.

The fact we believe to be, that the bride took a dislike to her husband. We cannot but have a suspicion that she did not like him before marriage, and that pecuniary reasons had their influence. If, however, Mr. Powell exerted his paternal influence, it may be admitted that he had unusual considerations to advance in favour of the alliance he proposed. It is not every father whose creditors are handsome young gentlemen with fair incomes. Perhaps it seemed no extreme tyranny to press the young lady a little to do that which some others might have done without pressing. Still, all this is but hypothesis; our evidence as to the love-affairs of the time of King Charles I. is but meagre. But, whatever the feelings of Miss Powell may have been, those of Mrs. Milton are exceedingly certain. She would not return to her husband; she did not answer his letters; and a messenger whom he sent to bring her back was handled rather roughly. Unquestionably, she was deeply to blame, by far the most to blame of the two. Whatever may be alleged against him, is as nothing compared with

[1] Philips.

her offence in leaving him. To defend so startling a course, we must adopt views of divorce even more extreme than those which Milton was himself driven to inculcate; and whatever Mrs. Milton's practice may have been, it may be fairly conjectured that her principles were strictly orthodox. Yet, if she could be examined by a commission to the ghosts, she would probably have some palliating circumstances to allege in mitigation of judgment. There were, perhaps, peculiarities in Milton's character which a young lady might not improperly dislike. The austere and ascetic character is of course far less agreeable to women than the sensuous and susceptible. The self-occupation, the pride, the abstraction of the former are to the female mind disagreeable; studious habits and unusual self-denial seem to it purposeless; lofty enthusiasm, public spirit, the solitary pursuit of an elevated ideal, are quite out of its way: they rest too little on the visible world to be intelligible, they are too little suggested by the daily occurrences of life to seem possible. The poet in search of an imaginary phantom has never been successful with women; there are innumerable proofs of that; and the ascetic moralist is even less interesting. A character combined out of the two—and this to some extent was Milton's—is singularly likely to meet with painful failure; with a failure the more painful that it could never anticipate or explain it. Possibly he was absorbed in an austere self-conscious excellence; it may never have occurred to him that a lady might prefer the trivial detail of daily happiness.

Milton's own view of the matter he has explained to us in his book on divorce; and it is a very odd one. His complaint was, that his wife would not talk. What he wished in marriage was an "intimate and speaking help"; he encountered a "mute and spiritless mate". One of his principal incitements to the "pious necessity of divorcing," was an unusual deficiency in household conversation. A certain loquacity in their wives has been the complaint of various eminent men; but his domestic affliction was a different one. The "ready and reviving associate," whom he had hoped to have found, appeared to be a "coinhabiting mischief," who was sullen, and perhaps

seemed bored and tired. And at times he is disposed to cast the blame of his misfortune on the uninstructive nature of youthful virtue. The "soberest and best-governed men," he says, are least practised in such affairs, are not very well aware that "the bashful muteness" of a young lady "may oft-times hide the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation"; and are rather in too great haste to light the nuptial torch: whereas those "who have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches; because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience". And he rather wishes to infer that the virtuous man should, in case of mischance, have his resource of divorce likewise.

In truth, Milton's book on divorce—though only containing principles which he continued to believe long after he had any personal reasons for wishing to do so—was clearly suggested at first by the unusual phenomena of his first marriage. His wife began by not speaking to him, and finished by running away from him. Accordingly, like most books which spring out of personal circumstances, his treatises on this subject have a frankness, and a mastery of detail, which others on the same topic sometimes want. He is remarkably free from one peculiarity of modern writers on such matters. Several considerate gentlemen are extremely anxious for the "rights of women". They think that women will benefit by removing the bulwarks which the misguided experience of ages has erected for their protection. A migratory system of domestic existence might suit Madame Dudevant, and a few cases of singular exception; but we cannot fancy that it would be, after all, so much to the taste of most ladies as the present more permanent system. We have some reminiscence of the stories of the wolf and the lamb, when we hear amiable men addressing a female auditory (in books, of course) on the advantages of a freer "development". We are perhaps wrong, but we cherish an indistinct suspicion that an indefinite extension of the power of selection would rather tend to the advantage of the sex which more usually chooses. But we have no occasion to avow such opinions now. Milton had no such modern views. He is frankly and honestly anxious

for the rights of the man. Of the doctrine that divorce is only permitted for the help of wives, he exclaims: "Palpably uxorious! who can be ignorant that a woman was created for man, and not man for woman? What an injury is it after wedlock to be slighted! what to be contended with in point of house-rule who shall be the head; not for any parity of wisdom, for that were something reasonable, but out of a female pride! 'I suffer not,' saith St. Paul, 'the woman to usurp authority over the man.' If the Apostle could not suffer it," he naturally remarks, "into what mould is he mortified that can?" He had a sincere desire to preserve men from the society of unsocial and unsympathising women; and that was his principal idea.

His theory, to a certain extent, partakes of the same notion. The following passage contains a perspicuous exposition of it: "Moses, Deut. xxiv. 1, established a grave and prudent law, full of moral equity, full of due consideration towards nature, that cannot be resisted, a law consenting with the wisest men and civilest nations; that when a man hath married a wife, if it come to pass that he cannot love her by reason of some displeasing natural quality or unfitness in her, let him write her a bill of divorce. The intent of which law undoubtedly was this, that if any good and peaceable man should discover some helpless disagreement or dislike, either of mind or body, whereby he could not cheerfully perform the duty of a husband without the perpetual dissembling of offence and disturbance to his spirit; rather than to live uncomfortably and unhappily both to himself and to his wife; rather than to continue undertaking a duty, which he could not possibly discharge, he might dismiss her, whom he could not tolerably, and so not conscionably, retain. And this law the Spirit of God by the mouth of Solomon, Prov. xxx. 21, 23, testifies to be a good and a necessary law, by granting it that 'a hated woman' (for so the Hebrew word signifies, rather than 'odious,' though it come all to one), that 'a hated woman, when she is married, is a thing that the earth cannot bear'." And he complains that the civil law of modern states interferes with the "domestical prerogative of the husband".

His notion would seem to have been that a husband was

bound not to dismiss his wife, except for a reason really sufficient; such as a thoroughly incompatible temper, an incorrigible "muteness," and a desertion like that of Mrs. Milton. But he scarcely liked to admit that, in the use of this power, he should be subject to the correction of human tribunals. He thought that the circumstances of each case depended upon "utterless facts"; and that it was practically impossible for a civil court to decide on a subject so delicate in its essence, and so imperceptible in its data. But though amiable men doubtless suffer much from the deficiencies of their wives, we should hardly like to entrust them, in their own cases, with a jurisdiction so prompt and summary.

We are far from being concerned, however, just now with the doctrine of divorce on its intrinsic merits: we were only intending to give such an account of Milton's opinions upon it as might serve to illustrate his character. We think we have shown that it is possible there may have been, in his domestic relations, a little overweening pride; a tendency to overrate the true extent of masculine rights, and to dwell on his wife's duty to be social towards him rather than on his duty to be social towards her,—to be rather sullen whenever she was not quite cheerful. Still, we are not defending a lady for leaving her husband for defects of such inferior magnitude. Few households would be kept together, if the right of transition were exercised on such trifling occasions. We are but suggesting that she may share the excuse which our great satirist has suggested for another unreliable lady: "My mother was an angel; but angels are not always *commodes à vivre*".

This is not a pleasant part of our subject, and we must leave it. It is more agreeable to relate that on no occasion of his life was the substantial excellence of Milton's character more conclusively shown, than in his conduct at the last stage of this curious transaction. After a very considerable interval, and after the publication of his book on divorce, Mrs. Milton showed a disposition to return to her husband; and, in spite of his theories, he received her with open arms. With great Christian patience, he received her relations too. The Parliamentary party was then victorious; and old Mr. Powell, who

had suffered very much in the cause of the king, lived until his death untroubled, and "wholly to his devotion," as we are informed, in the house of his son-in-law.

Of the other occurrences of Milton's domestic life we have left ourselves no room to speak; we must turn to our second source of illustration for his character,—his opinions on the great public events of his time. It may seem odd, but we believe that a man of austere character naturally tends *both* to an excessive party spirit and to an extreme isolation. Of course the circumstances which develop the one must be different from those which are necessary to call out the other: party spirit requires companionship; isolation, if we may be pardoned so original a remark, excludes it. But though, as we have shown, this species of character is prone to mental solitude, tends to an intellectual isolation where it is possible and as soon as it can, yet when invincible circumstances throw it into mental companionship, when it is driven into earnest association with earnest men on interesting topics, its zeal becomes excessive. Such a man's mind is at home only with its own enthusiasm; it is cooped up within the narrow limits of its own ideas, and it can make no allowance for those who differ from or oppose them. We may see something of this excessive party zeal in Burke. No one's reasons are more philosophical; yet no one who acted with a party went further in aid of it or was more violent in support of it. He forgot what could be said for the tenets of the enemy; his imagination made that enemy an abstract incarnation of his tenets. A man, too, who knows that he formed his opinions originally by a genuine and intellectual process, is but little aware of the undue energy those ideas may obtain from the concurrence of those around. Persons who first acquired their ideas at second-hand are more open to a knowledge of their own weakness, and better acquainted with the strange force which there is in the sympathy of others. The isolated mind, when it acts with the popular feeling, is apt to exaggerate that feeling for the most part by an almost inevitable consequence of the feelings which render it isolated. Milton is an example of this remark. In the commencement of the struggle between Charles I. and

the Parliament, he sympathised strongly with the popular movement, and carried to what seems now a strange extreme his partisanship. No one could imagine that the first literary Englishman of his time could write the following passage on Charles I. :—

"Who can with patience hear this filthy, rascally Fool speak so irreverently of Persons eminent both in Greatness and Piety? Dare you compare King *David* with King *Charles;* a most Religious King and Prophet, with a Superstitious Prince, and who was but a Novice in the Christian Religion; a most prudent, wise Prince with a weak one; a valiant Prince with a cowardly one; finally, a most just Prince with a most unjust one? Have you the impudence to commend his Chastity and Sobriety, who is known to have committed all manner of Leudness in company with his Confident the Duke of *Buckingham?* It were to no purpose to inquire into the private Actions of his Life, who publickly at Plays would embrace and kiss the Ladies."[1]

Whatever may be the faults of that ill-fated monarch—and they assuredly were not small—no one would now think this absurd invective to be even an excusable exaggeration. It misses the true mark altogether, and is the expression of a strongly imaginative mind, which has seen something that it did not like, and is unable in consequence to see anything that has any relation to it distinctly or correctly. But with the supremacy of the Long Parliament Milton's attachment to their cause ceased. No one has drawn a more unfavourable picture of the rule which they established. Years after their supremacy had passed away, and the restoration of the monarchy had covered with a new and strange scene the old actors and the old world, he thrust into a most unlikely part of his *History of England* the following attack on them :—

"But when once the superficiall zeal and popular fumes that acted their New Magistracy were cool'd and spent in them, strait every one betook himself (setting the Commonwealth behind, his privat ends before) to doe as his own profit or ambition ledd him. Then was justice delay'd, and soon after deni'd :

[1] *Defence of the People of England*, chap. iv.

spight and favour determin'd all: hence faction, thence treachery, both at home and in the field: ev'ry where wrong, and oppression: foull and horrid deeds committed daily, or maintain'd, in secret, or in open. Som who had bin call'd from shops and warehouses, without other merit, to sit in Supreme Councills and Committees as thir breeding was, fell to huckster the Commonwealth. Others did therafter as men could soothe and humour them best; so hee who would give most, or, under covert of hypocriticall zeale, insinuat basest, enjoy'd unworthily the rewards of lerning and fidelity; or escap'd the punishment of his crimes and misdeeds. Thir Votes and Ordinances, which men looked should have contain'd the repealing of bad laws, and the immediat constitution of better, resounded with nothing els, but new Impositions, Taxes, Excises; yeerly, monthly, weekly. Not to reckon the Offices, Gifts, and Preferments bestow'd and shar'd among themselves."

His dislike of this system of committees, and of the generally dull and unemphatic administration of the Commonwealth, attached him to the Puritan army and to Cromwell; but in the continuation of the passage we have referred to, he expresses, with something, let it be said, of a schoolmaster feeling, an unfavourable judgment on their career.

"For *Britan*, to speak a truth not oft'n spok'n, as it is a Land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in warr, soe it is naturally not over-fertill of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting onely in thir Motherwit; who consider not justly, that civility, prudence, love of the Publick good, more then of money or vaine honour, are to this soile in a manner outlandish; grow not here, but in mindes well implanted with solid and elaborat breeding, too impolitic els and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and vertue either of executing or understanding true Civill Government. Valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious, and unwise: in good or bad succes, alike unteachable. For the Sun, which wee want, ripens wits as well as fruits; and as Wine and Oil are imported to us from abroad, soe must ripe understanding, and many Civill Vertues, be imported into our

mindes from Foren Writings, and examples of best Ages; we shall els miscarry still, and com short in the attempts of any great enterprize. Hence did thir Victories prove as fruitles, as thir Losses dang'rous; and left them still conq'ring under the same greevances, that Men suffer conquer'd: which was indeed unlikely to goe otherwise, unles Men more then vulgar bred up, as few of them were, in the knowledg of antient and illustrious deeds, invincible against many and vaine Titles, impartial to Freindships and Relations, had conducted thir Affairs: but then from the Chapman to the Retailer, many whose ignorance was more audacious then the rest, were admitted with all thir sordid Rudiments to bear no meane sway among them, both in Church and State."

We need not speak of Milton's disapprobation of the Restoration. Between him and the world of Charles II. the opposition was inevitable and infinite. Therefore the general fact remains, that except in the early struggles, when he exaggerated the popular feeling, he remained solitary in opinion, and had very little sympathy with any of the prevailing parties of his time.

Milton's own theory of government is to be learned from his works. He advocated a free commonwealth, without rule of a single person, or House of Lords: but the form of his projected commonwealth was peculiar. He thought that a certain perpetual council, which should be elected by the nation once for all, and the number of which should be filled up as vacancies might occur, was the best possible machine of government. He did not confine his advocacy to abstract theory, but proposed the immediate establishment of such a council in this country. We need not go into an elaborate discussion to show the errors of this conclusion. Hardly any one, then or since, has probably adopted it. The interest of the theoretical parts of Milton's political works is entirely historical. The tenets advocated are not of great value, and the arguments by which he supports them are perhaps of less; but their relation to the times in which they were written gives them a very singular interest. The time of the Commonwealth was the only period in English history in which

the fundamental questions of government have been thrown open for popular discussion in this country. We read in French literature discussions on the advisability of establishing a monarchy, on the advisability of establishing a republic, on the advisability of establishing an empire; and, before we proceed to examine the arguments, we cannot help being struck at the strange contrast which this multiplicity of open questions presents to our own uninquiring acquiescence in the hereditary polity which has descended to us. "King, Lords, and Commons" are, we think, ordinances of nature. Yet Milton's political writings embody the reflections of a period when, for a few years, the government of England was nearly as much a subject of fundamental discussion as that of France was in 1851. An "invitation to thinkers," to borrow the phrase of Neckar, was given by the circumstances of the time; and, with the habitual facility of philosophical speculation, it was accepted, and used to the utmost.

Such are not the kind of speculations in which we expect assistance from Milton. It is not in its transactions with others, in its dealings with the manifold world, that the isolated and austere mind shows itself to the most advantage. Its strength lies in itself. It has "a calm and pleasing solitariness". It hears thoughts which others cannot hear. It enjoys the quiet and still air of delightful studies; and is ever conscious of such musing and poetry "as is not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her twin daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar".

> "Descend from Heav'n, Urania, by that name
> If rightly thou art call'd, whose voice divine
> Following, above th' Olympian hill I soar,
> Above the flight of Pegaséan wing.
> The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
> Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
> Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly born:
> Before the hills appear'd, or fountain flow'd,
> Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
> Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play

In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song. Up led by thee
Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presumed,
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
Thy temp'ring. With like safety guided down,
Return me to my native element;
Lest from this flying steed, unrein'd (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower clime),
Dismounted, on th' Aleian field I fall
Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.
Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
Within the visible diurnal sphere;
Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the east: still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few;
But drive far off the barb'rous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
To rapture, till the savage clamour drown'd
Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores;
For thou art heav'nly, she an empty dream."[1]

"An ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black: pale, but not cadaverous." "He used also to sit in a grey coarse cloth coat at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields, in warm, sunny weather;"[2] and the common people said he was inspired.

If from the man we turn to his works, we are struck at once with two singular contrasts. The first of them is this. The distinction between ancient and modern art is sometimes said, and perhaps truly, to consist in the simple bareness of the imaginative conceptions which we find in ancient art, and

[1] "Paradise Lost," book vii. [2] Richardson.

the comparatively complex clothing in which all modern creations are embodied. If we adopt this distinction, Milton seems in some sort ancient, and in some sort modern. Nothing is so simple as the subject-matter of his works. The two greatest of his creations, the character of Satan and the character of Eve, are two of the simplest—the latter probably the very simplest—in the whole field of literature. On this side Milton's art is classical. On the other hand, in no writer is the imagery more profuse, the illustrations more various, the dress altogether more splendid. And in this respect the style of his art seems romantic and modern. In real truth, however, it is only ancient art in a modern disguise. The dress is a mere dress, and can be stripped off when we will. We all of us do perhaps in memory strip it off ourselves. Notwithstanding the lavish adornments with which her image is presented, the character of Eve is still the simplest sort of feminine essence—the pure embodiment of that inner nature, which we believe and hope that women have. The character of Satan, though it is not so easily described, has nearly as few elements in it. The most purely modern conceptions will not bear to be unclothed in this matter. Their romantic garment clings inseparably to them. Hamlet and Lear are not to be thought of except as complex characters, with very involved and complicated embodiments. They are as difficult to draw out in words as the common characters of life are; that of Hamlet, perhaps, is more so. If we make it, as perhaps we should, the characteristic of modern and romantic art that it presents us with creations which we cannot think of or delineate except as very varied, and, so to say, circumstantial, we must not rank Milton among the masters of romantic art. And without involving the subject in the troubled sea of an old controversy, we may say that the most striking of the poetical peculiarities of Milton is the bare simplicity of his ideas, and the rich abundance of his illustrations.

Another of his peculiarities is equally striking. There seems to be such a thing as second-hand poetry. Some poets, musing on the poetry of other men, have unconsciously

shaped it into something of their own: the new conception is like the original, it would never probably have existed had not the original existed previously; still it is sufficiently different from the original to be a new thing, not a copy or a plagiarism; it is a creation, though, so to say, a suggested creation. Gray is as good an example as can be found of a poet whose works abound in this species of semi-original conceptions. Industrious critics track his best lines back, and find others like them which doubtless lingered near his fancy while he was writing them. The same critics have been equally busy with the works of Milton, and equally successful. They find traces of his reading in half his works; not, which any reader could do, in overt similes and distinct illustrations, but also in the very texture of the thought and the expression. In many cases, doubtless, they discover more than he himself knew. A mind like his, which has an immense store of imaginative recollections, can never know which of his own imaginations is exactly suggested by which recollection. Men awake with their best ideas; it is seldom worth while to investigate very curiously whence they came. Our proper business is to adapt, and mould, and act upon them. Of poets perhaps this is true even more remarkably than of other men; their ideas are suggested in modes, and according to laws, which are even more impossible to specify than the ideas of the rest of the world. Second-hand poetry, so to say, often seems quite original to the poet himself; he frequently does not know that he derived it from an old memory; years afterwards it may strike him as it does others. Still, in general, such inferior species of creation is not so likely to be found in minds of singular originality as in those of less. A brooding, placid, cultivated mind, like that of Gray, is the place where we should expect to meet with it. Great originality disturbs the adaptive process, removes the mind of the poet from the thoughts of other men, and occupies it with its own heated and flashing thoughts. Poetry of the second degree is like the secondary rocks of modern geology—a still, gentle, alluvial formation; the igneous glow of primary genius brings forth ideas like the primeval granite, simple, astounding, and alone. Milton's

case is an exception to this rule. His mind has marked originality, probably as much of it as any in literature; but it has as much of moulded recollection as any mind too. His poetry in consequence is like an artificial park, green, and soft, and beautiful, yet with outlines bold, distinct, and firm, and the eternal rock ever jutting out; or, better still, it is like our own Lake scenery, where Nature has herself the same combination—where we have Rydal Water side by side with the everlasting upheaved mountain. Milton has the same union of softened beauty with unimpaired grandeur; and it is his peculiarity.

These are the two contrasts which puzzle us at first in Milton, and which distinguish him from other poets in our remembrance afterwards. We have a superficial complexity in illustration, and imagery, and metaphor; and in contrast with it we observe a latent simplicity of idea, an almost rude strength of conception. The underlying thoughts are few, though the flowers on the surface are so many. We have likewise the perpetual contrast of the soft poetry of the memory, and the firm, as it were fused, and glowing poetry of the imagination. His words, we may half fancifully say, are like his character. There is the same austerity in the real essence, the same exquisiteness of sense, the same delicacy of form which we know that he had, the same music which we imagine there was in his voice. In both his character and his poetry there was an ascetic nature in a sheath of beauty.

No book perhaps which has ever been written is more difficult to criticise than "Paradise Lost". The only way to criticise a work of the imagination, is to describe its effect upon the mind of the reader—at any rate, of the critic; and this can only be adequately delineated by strong illustrations, apt similes, and perhaps a little exaggeration. The task is in its very nature not an easy one; the poet paints a picture on the fancy of the critic, and the critic has in some sort to copy it on the paper. He must say what it is before he can make remarks upon it. But in the case of "Paradise Lost" we hardly like to use illustrations. The subject is one which the imagination rather shrinks from. At any rate, it requires

courage, and an effort to compel the mind to view such a subject as distinctly and vividly as it views other subjects. Another peculiarity of "Paradise Lost" makes the difficulty even greater. It does not profess to be a mere work of art; or rather, it claims to be by no means that, and that only. It starts with a dogmatic aim; it avowedly intends to

> "assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man".

In this point of view we have always had a sympathy with the Cambridge mathematician who has been so much abused. He said, "After all, 'Paradise Lost' *proves* nothing"; and various persons of poetical tastes and temperament have been very severe on the prosaic observation. Yet, "after all," he was right. Milton professed to prove something. He was too profound a critic—rather, he had too profound an instinct of those eternal principles of art which criticism tries to state—not to know that on such a subject he must prove something. He professed to deal with the great problem of human destiny; to show why man was created, in what kind of universe he lives, whence he came, and whither he goes. He dealt of necessity with the greatest of subjects. He had to sketch the greatest of objects. He was concerned with infinity and eternity even more than with time and sense; he undertook to delineate the ways, and consequently the character of Providence, as well as the conduct and the tendencies of man. The essence of success in such an attempt is to satisfy the religious sense of man; to bring home to our hearts what we know to be true; to teach us what we have not seen; to awaken us to what we have forgotten; to remove the "covering" from all people, and the "veil" that is spread over all nations; to give us, in a word, such a conception of things divine and human as we can accept, believe and trust. The true doctrine of criticism demands what Milton invites—an examination of the degree in which the great epic attains this aim. And if, in examining it, we find it necessary to use unusual illustrations, and plainer words than are customary, it must be our excuse that we do not think the subject can be made clear without them.

The defect of "Paradise Lost" is that, after all, it is founded on a *political* transaction. The scene is in heaven very early in the history of the universe, before the creation of man or the fall of Satan. We have a description of a court. The angels,

> "By imperial summons called,"

appear

> "Under their hierarchs in orders bright:
> Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,
> Standards and gonfalons 'twixt van and rear
> Stream in the air, and for distinction serve
> Of hierarchies, and orders, and degrees".

To this assemblage "th' Omnipotent" speaks:—

> "Hear, all ye Angels, progeny of light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
> Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand:
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son; and on this holy hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow
> All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
> Under his great vicegerent reign abide
> United as one individual soul
> For ever happy. Him who disobeys,
> Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Int' utter darkness, deep ingulph'd, his place
> Ordain'd without redemption, without end."

This act of patronage was not popular at court; and why should it have been? The religious sense is against it. The worship which sinful men owe to God is not transferable to lieutenants and vicegerents. The whole scene of the court jars upon a true feeling. We seem to be reading about some emperor of history, who admits his son to a share in the empire, who confers on him a considerable jurisdiction, and requires officials, with "standards and gonfalons," to bow before him. The orthodoxy of Milton is quite as questionable as his accuracy. The old Athanasian creed was not made by persons who would allow such a picture as that of Milton to

stand before their imaginations. The generation of the Son was to them a fact "before all time"; an eternal fact. There was no question in their minds of patronage or promotion. The Son was the Son before all time, just as the Father was the Father before all time. Milton had in such matters a bold but not very sensitive imagination. He accepted the inevitable materialism of biblical, and, to some extent, of all religious language as distinct revelation. He certainly believed, in contradiction to the old creed, that God had both "parts and passions". He imagined that earth

> "Is but the shadow of heaven and things therein,
> Each to other like more than on earth is thought".[1]

From some passages it would seem that he actually thought of God as having "the members and form" of a man. Naturally, therefore, he would have no toleration for the mysterious notions of time and eternity which are involved in the traditional doctrine. We are not, however, now concerned with Milton's belief, but with his representation of his creed—his picture, so to say, of it in "Paradise Lost"; still, as we cannot but think, that picture is almost irreligious, and certainly different from that which has been generally accepted in Christendom. Such phrases as "before all time," "eternal generation," are doubtless very vaguely interpreted by the mass of men; nevertheless, no sensitively orthodox man *could* have drawn the picture of a generation, not to say an exaltation, *in* time.

We shall see this more clearly by reading what follows in the poem:—

> "All seemed well pleased; all seemed, but were not all".

One of the archangels, whose name can be guessed, decidedly disapproved, and calls a meeting, at which he explains that

> "orders and degrees
> Jar not with liberty, but well consist";

but still, that the promotion of a new person, on grounds of relationship merely, above, even infinitely above, the old

[1] Book v., "Raphael to Adam".

angels, with imperial titles, was "a new law," and rather tyrannical. Abdiel,

> "than whom none with more zeal adored
> The Deity, and with divine commands obeyed,"

attempts a defence:

> "Grant it thee unjust,
> That equal over equals monarch reign:
> Thyself, though great and glorious, dost thou count,
> Or all angelic nature join'd in one,
> Equal to him begotten Son? by whom
> As by his Word the mighty Father made
> All things, ev'n thee; and all the Spirits of Heav'n
> By him created in their bright degrees,
> Crown'd them with glory, and to their glory named
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
> Essential Pow'rs; nor by his reign obscured,
> But more illustrious made; since he the Head,
> One of our number thus reduced becomes;
> His laws our laws; all honour to him done
> Returns our own. Cease then this impious rage,
> And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
> Th' incensed Father and th' incensed Son,
> While pardon may be found, in time besought."

Yet though Abdiel's intentions were undeniably good, his argument is rather specious. Acting as an instrument in the process of creation would scarcely give a valid claim to the obedience of the created being. Power may be shown in the act, no doubt; but mere power gives no true claim to the obedience of moral beings. It is a kind of principle of all manner of idolatries and false religions to believe that it does so. Satan, besides, takes issue on the fact:

> "That we were formed then, say'st thou? and the work
> Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
> From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
> Doctrine which we would know whence learned."

And we must say that the speech in which the new ruler is introduced to the "thrones, dominations, princedoms, powers," is hard to reconcile with Abdiel's exposition, "*This day*" he seems to have come into existence, and could hardly have assisted at the creation of the angels, who are not young, and who converse with one another like old acquaintances.

We have gone into this part of the subject at length, because it is the source of the great error which pervades "Paradise Lost". Satan is made *interesting*. This has been the charge of a thousand orthodox and even heterodox writers against Milton. Shelley, on the other hand, has gloried in it; and fancied, if we remember rightly, that Milton intentionally ranged himself on the Satanic side of the universe, just as Shelley himself would have done, and that he wished to show the falsity of the ordinary theology. But Milton was born an age too early for such aims, and was far too sincere to have advocated any doctrine in a form so indirect. He believed every word he said. He was not conscious of the effect his teaching would produce in an age like this, when scepticism is in the air, and when it is not possible to help looking coolly on his delineations. Probably in our boyhood we can recollect a period when any solemn description of celestial events would have commanded our respect; we should not have dared to read it intelligently, to canvass its details and see what it meant: it was a religious book; it sounded reverential, and that would have sufficed. Something like this was the state of mind of the seventeenth century. Even Milton probably shared in a vague reverence for religious language. He hardly felt the moral effect of the pictures he was drawing. His artistic instinct, too, often hurries him away. His Satan was to him, as to us, the hero of his poem. Having commenced by making him resist on an occasion which in an earthly kingdom would have been excusable and proper, he probably a little sympathised with him, just as his readers do.

The interest of Satan's character is at its height in the first two books. Coleridge justly compared it to that of Napoleon. There is the same pride, the same Satanic ability, the same will, the same egotism. His character seems to grow with his position. He is far finer after his fall, in misery and suffering, with scarcely any resource except in himself, than he was originally in heaven; at least, if Raphael's description of him can be trusted. No portrait which imagination or history has drawn of a revolutionary anarch is nearly so perfect; there is all the grandeur of the greatest human mind, and certain

infinitude in his circumstances which humanity must ever want. Few Englishmen feel a profound reverence for Napoleon I. There was no French alliance in *his* time; we have most of us some tradition of antipathy to him. Yet hardly any Englishman can read the account of the campaign of 1814 without feeling his interest in the emperor to be strong, and without perhaps being conscious of a latent wish that he may succeed. Our opinion is against him, our serious wish is of course for England; but the imagination has a sympathy of its own, and will not give place. We read about the great general—never greater than in that last emergency—showing resources of genius that seem almost infinite, and that assuredly have never been surpassed, yet vanquished, yielding to the power of circumstances, to the combined force of adversaries, each of whom singly he outmatches in strength, and all of whom together he surpasses in majesty and in mind. Something of the same sort of interest belongs to the Satan of the first two books of "Paradise Lost". We know that he will be vanquished; his name is not a recommendation. Still we do not imagine distinctly the minds by which he is to be vanquished; we do not take the same interest in them that we do in him; our sympathies, our fancy are on his side.

Perhaps much of this was inevitable; yet what a defect it is! especially what a defect in Milton's own view, and looked at with the stern realism with which he regarded it! Suppose that the author of evil in the universe were the most attractive being in it; suppose that the source of all sin were the origin of all interest to us! We need not dwell upon this.

As we have said, much of this was difficult to avoid, if indeed it could be avoided, in dealing with such a theme. Even Milton shrank, in some measure, from delineating the Divine character. His imagination evidently halts when it is required to perform that task. The more delicate imagination of our modern world would shrink still more. Any person who will consider what such an attempt must end in, will find his nerves quiver. But by a curiously fatal error, Milton has selected for delineation exactly that part of the Divine nature which is most beyond the reach of the human faculties, and which is

also, when we try to describe our fancy of it, the least effective to our minds. He has made God *argue*. Now the procedure of the Divine mind from truth to truth must ever be incomprehensible to us; the notion, indeed, of His proceeding at all, is a contradiction: to some extent, at least, it is inevitable that we should use such language, but we know it is in reality inapplicable. A long train of reasoning in such a connection is so out of place as to be painful; and yet Milton has many. He relates a series of family prayers in heaven, with sermons afterwards, which are very tedious. Even Pope was shocked at the notion of Providence talking like "a school-divine".[1] And there is the still worse error, that if you once attribute reasoning to Him, subsequent logicians may discover that He does not reason very well.

Another way in which Milton has contrived to strengthen our interest in Satan, is the number and insipidity of the good angels. There are old rules as to the necessity of a supernatural machinery for an epic poem, worth some fraction of the paper on which they are written, and derived from the practice of Homer, who believed his gods and goddesses to be real beings, and would have been rather harsh with a critic who called them machinery. These rules had probably an influence with Milton, and induced him to manipulate those serious angels more than he would have done otherwise. They appear to be excellent administrators with very little to do; a kind of grand chamberlains with wings, who fly down to earth and communicate information to Adam and Eve. They have no character; they are essentially messengers, merely conductors, so to say, of the providential will: no one fancies that they have an independent power of action; they seem scarcely to have minds of their own. No effect can be more unfortunate. If the struggle of Satan had been with Deity directly, the natural instincts of religion would have been awakened; but when an angel possessed of mind is contrasted with angels possessed only of wings, we sympathise with the former.

In the first two books, therefore, our sympathy with Mil-

[1] Imitation of Horace's Epistle to Augustus, book ii., ep. 1.

ton's Satan is great; we had almost said unqualified. The speeches he delivers are of well-known excellence. Lord Brougham, no contemptible judge of emphatic oratory, has laid down, that if a person had not an opportunity of access to the great Attic masterpieces, he had better choose these for a model. What is to be regretted about the orator is, that he scarcely acts up to his sentiments. "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," is, at any rate, an audacious declaration. But he has no room for exhibiting similar audacity in action. His offensive career is limited. In the nature of the subject there was scarcely any opportunity for the fallen archangel to display in the detail of his operations the surpassing intellect with which Milton has endowed him. He goes across chaos, gets into a few physical difficulties; but these are not much. His grand aim is the conquest of our first parents; and we are at once struck with the enormous inequality of the conflict. Two beings just created, without experience, without guile, without knowledge of good and evil, are expected to contend with a being on the delineation of whose powers every resource of art and imagination, every subtle suggestion, every emphatic simile, has been lavished. The idea in every reader's mind is, and must be, not surprise that our first parents should yield, but wonder that Satan should not think it beneath him to attack them. It is as if an army should invest a cottage.

We have spoken more of theology than we intended; and we need not say how much the monstrous inequalities attributed to the combatants affect our estimate of the results of the conflict. The state of man is what it is, because the defenceless Adam and Eve of Milton's imagination yielded to the nearly all-powerful Satan whom he has delineated. Milton has in some sense invented this difficulty; for in the book of Genesis there is no such inequality. The serpent may be subtler than any beast of the field; but he is not necessarily subtler or cleverer than man. So far from Milton having justified the ways of God to man, he has loaded the common theology with a new encumbrance.

We may need refreshment after this discussion; and we cannot find it better than in reading a few remarks of Eve.

"That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade of flow'rs, much wond'ring where
And what I was, whence hither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murm'ring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n. . . . I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seem'd another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd,
Bending to look on me. I started back;
It started back: but pleased I soon return'd;
Pleased it return'd as soon with answ'ring looks
Of sympathy and love: there I had fix'd
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warn'd me. What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself;
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine: to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd
Mother of Human Race. What could I do
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall
Under a platan; yet methought less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
Than that smooth wat'ry image. Back I turn'd:
Thou following cry'dst aloud, Return, fair Eve;
Whom fly'st thou?"[1]

Eve's character, indeed, is one of the most wonderful efforts of the human imagination. She is a kind of abstract woman; essentially a typical being; and official "mother of all living". Yet she is a real interesting woman, not only full of delicacy and sweetness, but with all the undefinable fascination, the charm of personality, which such typical characters hardly ever have. By what consummate miracle of wit this charm of individuality is preserved, without impairing the general idea

[1] Book iv.

which is ever present to us, we cannot explain, for we do not know.

Adam is far less successful. He has good hair,—"hyacinthine locks" that "from his parted forelock manly hung"; a "fair large front" and "eye sublime"; but he has little else that we care for. There is, in truth, no opportunity of displaying manly virtues, even if he possessed them. He has only to yield to his wife's solicitations, which he does. Nor are we sure that he does it well. He is very tedious; he indulges in sermons which are good; but most men cannot but fear that so delightful a being as Eve must have found him tiresome. She steps away, however, and goes to sleep at some of the worst points.

Dr. Johnson remarked, that, after all, "Paradise Lost" was one of the books which no one wished longer: we fear, in this irreverent generation, some wish it shorter. Hardly any reader would be sorry if some portions of the later books had been spared him. Coleridge, indeed, discovered profound mysteries in the last; but in what could not Coleridge find a mystery if he wished? Dryden more wisely remarked that Milton became tedious when he entered upon a "tract of Scripture".[1] Nor is it surprising that such is the case. The style of many parts of Scripture is such that it will not bear addition or subtraction. A word less, or an idea more, and the effect upon the mind is the same no longer. Nothing can be more tiresome than a sermonic amplification of such passages. It is almost too much when, as from the pulpit, a paraphrastic commentary is prepared for our spiritual improvement. In deference to the intention we bear it, but we bear it unwillingly; and we cannot endure it at all when, as in poems, the object is to awaken our fancy rather than to improve our conduct. The account of the creation in the book of Genesis is one of the compositions from which no sensitive imagination would subtract an iota, to which it could not bear to add a word. Milton's paraphrase is alike copious and ineffective. The universe is, in railway phrase, "opened," but not created; no green earth springs in a moment from the indefinite void. Instead,

[1] "Essay on Satire."

too, of the simple loneliness of the Old Testament, several angelic officials are in attendance, who help in nothing, but indicate that heaven must be plentifully supplied with tame creatures.

There is no difficulty in writing such criticisms, and, indeed, other unfavourable criticisms on "Paradise Lost". There is scarcely any book in the world which is open to a greater number, or which a reader who allows plain words to produce a due effect will be less satisfied with. Yet what book is really greater? In the best parts the words have a magic in them; even in the inferior passages you are hardly sensible of their inferiority till you translate them into your own language. Perhaps no style ever written by man expressed so adequately the conceptions of a mind so strong and so peculiar; a manly strength, a haunting atmosphere of enhancing suggestions, a firm continuous music, are only some of its excellences. To comprehend the whole of the others, you must take the volume down and read it,—the best defence of Milton, as has been said most truly, against all objections.

Probably no book shows the transition which our theology has made since the middle of the seventeenth century, at once so plainly and so fully. We do not now compose long narratives to "justify the ways of God to man". The more orthodox we are, the more we shrink from it; the more we hesitate at such a task, the more we allege that we have no powers for it. Our most celebrated defences of established tenets are in the style of Butler, not in that of Milton. They do not profess to show a satisfactory explanation of human destiny; on the contrary, they hint that probably we could not understand such an explanation if it were given us; at any rate, they allow that it is not given us. Their course is palliative. They suggest an "analogy of difficulties". If our minds were greater, so they reason, we should comprehend these doctrines: now we cannot explain analogous facts which we see and know. No style can be more opposite to the bold argument, the boastful exposition of Milton. The teaching of the eighteenth century is in the very atmosphere we breathe. We read it in the teachings of Oxford; we hear it from the

missionaries of the Vatican. The air of the theology is clarified. We know our difficulties, at least; we are rather prone to exaggerate the weight of some than to deny the reality of any.

We cannot continue a line of thought which would draw us on too far for the patience of our readers. We must, however, make one more remark, and we shall have finished our criticism on "Paradise Lost". It is analogous to that which we have just made. The scheme of the poem is based on an offence against positive morality. The offence of Adam was not against nature or conscience, nor against anything of which we can see the reason, or conceive the obligation, but against an unexplained injunction of the Supreme Will. The rebellion in heaven, as Milton describes it, was a rebellion, not against known ethics, or immutable spiritual laws, but against an arbitrary selection and an unexplained edict. We do not say that there is no such thing as positive morality: we do not think so; even if we did, we should not insert a proposition so startling at the conclusion of a literary criticism. But we are sure that wherever a positive moral edict is promulgated, it is no subject, except perhaps under a very peculiar treatment, for literary art. By the very nature of it, it cannot satisfy the heart and conscience. It is a difficulty; we need not attempt to explain it away. There are mysteries enough which will never be explained away. But it is contrary to every principle of criticism to state the difficulty as if it were not one; to bring forward the puzzle, yet leave it to itself; to publish so strange a problem, and give only an untrue solution of it: and yet such, in its bare statement, is all that Milton has done.

Of Milton's other writings we have left ourselves no room to speak; and though every one of them, or almost every one of them, would well repay a careful criticism, yet few of them seem to throw much additional light on his character, or add much to our essential notion of his genius, though they may exemplify and enhance it. "Comus" is the poem which does so the most. Literature has become so much lighter than it used to be, that we can scarcely realise the position it occupied in the light literature of our forefathers. We have now in

our own language many poems that are pleasanter in their subject, more graceful in their execution, more flowing in their outline, more easy to read. Dr. Johnson, though perhaps no very excellent authority on the more intangible graces of literature, was disposed to deny to Milton the capacity of creating the lighter literature: "Milton, madam, was a genius that could cut a colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones". And it would not be surprising if this generation, which has access to the almost indefinite quantity of lighter compositions which have been produced since Johnson's time, were to echo his sentence. In some degree, perhaps, the popular taste does so. "Comus" has no longer the peculiar exceptional popularity which it used to have. We can talk without general odium of its defects. Its characters are nothing, its sentiments are tedious, its story is not interesting. But it is only when we have realised the magnitude of its deficiencies that we comprehend the peculiarity of its greatness. Its power is in its style. A grave and firm music pervades it: it is soft, without a thought of weakness; harmonious and yet strong; impressive, as few such poems are, yet covered with a bloom of beauty and a complexity of charm that few poems have either. We have, perhaps, light literature in itself better, that we read oftener and more easily, that lingers more in our memories; but we have not any, we question if there ever will be any, which gives so true a conception of the capacity and the dignity of the mind by which it was produced. The breath of solemnity which hovers round the music attaches us to the writer. Every line, here as elsewhere, in Milton excites the idea of indefinite power.

And so we must draw to a close. The subject is an infinite one, and if we pursued it, we should lose ourselves in miscellaneous commentary, and run on far beyond the patience of our readers. What we have said has at least a defined intention. We have wished to state the impression which the character of Milton and the greatest of Milton's works are likely to produce on readers of the present generation—a generation different from his own almost more than any other.

THE HISTORY OF THE UNREFORMED PARLIAMENT, AND ITS LESSONS.[1]

(1860.)

PERHAPS no subject of historical research should be so interesting just now as the practical working of our system of Parliamentary representation before 1832. The principles of representative government are again about to be brought under discussion; a new proposal for Parliamentary Reform must be announced before many weeks are past. The more that subject is discussed, the more do all thoughtful persons wish to consult the lessons of experience with respect to it. We feel more than we used to do the difficulty of the question; we distrust more the tenets of pure democracy; we know more of the complexity of a cultivated community; we know the necessity of giving to each class the weight which it ought to have, and no greater weight: in conseqence, we feel more than formerly the intellectual prudence of recurring to the facts of experience. But unfortunately there are very few such facts. Of all important political expedients, representation is by far the newest; and our experience with respect to it is therefore scanty and limited. The continental nations who have made trial of representative government, have done so almost always under exceptional circumstances, and in each case the national

[1] *The Rise and Progress of the English Constitution.* By E. S. Creasy, M.A. Fourth edition, revised and with additions. London: Richard Bentley, 1858.

The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland: being a History of the House of Commons, and of the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs of the United Kingdom, from the earliest Period. By T. H. B. Oldfield. In six volumes. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1816.

character of the particular nation which made the trial has very greatly affected the result of it. The experience of America is, from many causes, difficult to apply to the times in which we live. The difference of circumstances, both economical and social, is a perpetually modifying force, which tends to make a sweeping deduction almost necessarily unsound. The contrast between a new country and an old; between a State in which there is an endowed Church and a landed aristocracy, and one in which there is neither; between a society in which slavery exists and one in which it does not;—is too great to be unimportant, and too pervading to be eliminated. Nor is it easy to derive effectual instruction from the working of the system which is in operation now. At least, it is difficult to derive instruction which *others* will think satisfactory. We may, and do, make out points sufficiently clearly to ourselves; but in the heat of controversy, and in the confusion of contemporary events, others, in fact, derive from the same data the contrary deductions. We are therefore thrown back on our own history for such instruction as it may give us; and the break made by the Reform Act of 1832 is, at least in this respect, useful. We can draw lessons from the times preceding it with the calmness of history, and nevertheless those times may yield us instruction. They are far enough from our own age to be dispassionately considered; they resemble it enough to suggest analogies for our guidance. Nor is this history in itself uninteresting. The unreformed system of representative government is that which lasted the longest; which was contemporary with the greatest events; which has developed the greatest orators, and which has trained the most remarkable statesmen. No apology, therefore, seems to be needed for writing upon the subject at present, even if we should write at some length.

To give an exact account of the old English system of representation is, however, no easy task. At present the statistical information which we possess respecting the electoral system which exists is exceedingly abundant. We can tell the number of voters in every borough and every county; we know by what right of suffrage they are entitled to vote, and how many of them have chosen in any case to exercise their

right at each successive election. Compendious works specify what lord or commoner has influence in such or such a town: they say whether it is preponderant and all-powerful, or only moderate and sometimes resisted; they tell us in which town money has overwhelming influence, and enumerate the occasions upon which the use of that influence has been proved before the proper tribunal. We can hardly hope to obtain better information as to the actual working of a system than that which we have as to the system under which we are living. A hundred years ago our ancestors were nearly destitute of all such information. They had no means of telling the number of voters in any borough or county; no register existed from which it could be discovered; the right of voting in different places was exceedingly different, and the decisions of the House of Commons respecting them had been very confused From political motives, indeed, these decisions were often contradictory; they were made to suit the requirements of the moment and the commands of the Minister of the day, and a judicial spirit was, while the decision lay with a committee of the whole House of Commons, scarcely even affected. Sir Robert Walpole used to say that in election committees there ought to be "no quarter;" and the final fate of his long administration was determined by a division on an election petition from Chippenham. As the deciding power respecting electoral rights was so inconsistent, it would perhaps hardly have been worth while to collect its decisions; and no one did so. A hundred years ago, the constant reference to precise numerical data which distinguishes our present discussions was by no means in use; and even if the number of the electoral body had been more easy of ascertainment, no one probably would have ascertained it. The Government had not yet established a census of its subjects, and would not perhaps have liked to have the voters who chose it counted. At any rate, no one did count them; and a very general notion respecting the practical working of our representative system was all which could be formed at the time, or that can be formed now.

The representation of England and Wales was formerly, as

now, in the hands of counties and boroughs. The number of counties was the same as it now is; but they were as yet undivided for the purposes of representation. The number of boroughs was very considerable, and this of itself led to difficulty.

It is evident that in early times, when population was small and trade scanty, it would be difficult to find very many boroughs that would be fit to elect proper members of Parliament. We know by trial that a town constituency, to be pure and to be independent, must be of fair size, and must contain a considerable number of better-class inhabitants: unless it be so, it will assuredly succumb to one of two dangers; it will fall under the yoke of some proprietor who will purchase the place as a whole, or it will be purchased, vote by vote, at each election. Nothing, both experience and theory explain to us, is so futile as to expect continued purity and continued independence from a small number of persons who have something valuable to sell, and who would gain what is an object to them by selling it. But of considerable towns the number was once exceedingly few. Internal commerce and foreign trade have made such enormous strides in England recently, that we hardly realise the poverty of former times, or the small number of people who lived where we live now. Statistics, though they may give us a statement of the fact, do not, and cannot, fill our imaginations with it. We may get a better notion of what England was in numbers and wealth from travelling in the purely agricultural, the less advanced and poorer parts, of the Continent, than we can from figures and books. We shall in that way gain a vivid impression that it would be impossible in a rude age and country to find a very great number of towns large enough to elect representatives independently, and rich enough to elect them uncorruptly.

In the system which prevailed a hundred and fifty years ago our ancestors had much aggravated this difficulty. They had not selected the most considerable towns to be Parliamentary constituencies; they had not taken all the largest, and they had taken several of the smallest. We need not now explain why this happened. We have no room to discuss the

antiquities of the old boroughs; we cannot tell in many cases why some were chosen which were chosen. But two facts are incontestable: of which one is, that there was probably much original caprice in the selection of town constituencies. The sheriff had at first a certain discretionary power, and we do not know very precisely how he exercised it. The boroughs themselves were anxious, not to obtain the right, but to evade the obligation, of sending members to Parliament. Provided a respectable number of borough members appeared in their places to assent to the requisite taxes, and to indicate by their demeanour, if not by their votes, the popular feeling on the topics of the day, the early rulers of England, those rulers who laid the foundations of our representative system, were satisfied. They felt no nice scruples as to the exact magnitude of the towns which did not send members, or of those which did so. In the times of the Tudors, and a little later, the Crown exercised its prerogative of creating new boroughs; and as the popular spirit had then begun to be a subject of dread, and the voice of the House of Commons was already of some importance, we need not hesitate to imagine that the statesmen of the time regarded the "loyalty" or subservience of the boroughs they created, rather than their precise size. English statesmen look to the wants of the day, and especially to the wants of their own administration, much more than to complex figures; they do so even at the present day, when statistical tables will be paraded against them: how much more did they not improbably do so in the reigns of the Tudors, when there was no check upon them in any matter requiring much research or information; when, if they chose to disregard numerical data, no one else could know, far less prove, that they had done so! Nor was original caprice the only cause that had given representatives to many boroughs which in the eighteenth century seemed scarcely fit to choose them, and which denied them to others which appeared to be much more fit. In the contest between the Stuarts and the people, the Crown lost its old prerogative of creating boroughs; the moment there was a contest between the House of Commons and the sovereign, it became clear that the sovereign must be victorious if he could

add members to the former at his pleasure. Accordingly the House of Commons impugned the validity of the so-called prerogative; their resistance was successful, and it was exercised no longer. In consequence the old boroughs remained, and no new ones were added; and as, in a changing country like this, many places which were formerly large gradually became small, and many small ones on the other hand became large, the distribution of wealth and numbers came in process of time, and by a process which no one watched, to be altogether different from the distribution of Parliamentary influence.

Nor was this the only way in which the inherent difficulty of finding good town constituencies in poor and rude times was artificially aggravated in our old system of representation. Not only were the best boroughs not chosen to be constituencies, but the best persons in those boroughs were not chosen to be electors. The old and complex rights of suffrage in different boroughs are antiquarian matters, on which we have not a single line of space to bestow; but they differed very much. Originally, perhaps, the right or duty had belonged or attached to all rate-paying householders; but this simple definition, if it ever existed, had long passed away, and the rights of suffrage had become most various. No short description, much less any single definition, would include them. We give those which existed in the boroughs of two counties, Somersetshire and Lancashire, to show how great the diversity was, and how many "permutations and combinations" it embraced.

SOMERSETSHIRE.

BRISTOL	Freeholders of 40*s.* and free burgesses.
BATH	Mayor, aldermen, and common councilmen only.
WELLS	Mayor, masters, burgesses, and freemen of the seven trading companies of the said city.
TAUNTON	Potwallers, not receiving alms or charity.
BRIDGEWATER	Mayor, aldermen, and twenty-four capital burgesses of the borough paying scot and lot.
ILCHESTER	Alleged to be the inhabitants of the said town paying scot and lot, which the town called potwallers.
MINEHEAD	The parishioners of Dunster and Minehead, being housekeepers in the borough of Minehead, and not receiving alms.

MILBORN PORT	The capital bailiffs and their deputies, the number of bailiffs being nine, and their deputies being two; the commonalty stewards, their number being two; and the inhabitants thereof paying scot and lot.

LANCASHIRE.

LANCASTER	Freemen only.
WIGAN	Free burgesses.
CLITHEROE	Freeholders, resident and non-resident.
LIVERPOOL	Mayor, bailiffs, and freemen not receiving alms.
PRESTON	All the inhabitants.

Generally speaking, we may perhaps say that the original scot-and-lot (or rate-paying) qualification had been submitted to two opposite forces of alteration. By one it had been restricted to certain inhabitants of the town who, by virtue of some corporate right or municipal office, assumed to themselves to be its most important and chief inhabitants. These principal persons were usually few, and they prudently contrived that their number should not be augmented. They formed themselves into self-renewing corporations: at every vacancy the remaining members filled up the place as they deemed best, and they took care no one should have votes for the borough but themselves. On the other hand, by a second process, the borough suffrage had been widened so as to include all freemen, or all inhabitant householders not receiving alms; everybody, in short, who could be included in it. The process of extension, as was natural, was of the two the older process. While the right of electing members was attended by the duty of paying them, it was an onerous burden, and the chief people in the place tried to extend it as far as they well could; in later times, when members were no longer paid, and political advantages were to be obtained by the skilful use of a vote, the influential people of a borough tried as much as possible to keep the Parliamentary suffrage to themselves. In the last attempt they generally succeeded. The boroughs in which the people at large elected the members were, in the eighteenth century, far fewer than those in which a few persons of one sort or another elected them. The tendency of the House of Com-

mons itself, from various causes, was rather to confine than to extend the right of suffrage. But in whichever direction the progress of time had altered what we may suppose to have been the original right of franchise, whether it had restricted it or had extended it, the effect upon the constituency was almost equally bad. If it was much narrowed, it fell into the hands of a very small number of persons, who used for their own benefit what had become a very marketable privilege; and if the franchise had been very much extended—especially if it became, as in several places it did, nearly equivalent to universal suffrage—we may readily conceive in what manner it was used, when we remember that many of the boroughs were small, that in that age corruption was thought far less disgraceful than at present, and that the poorer classes were much poorer and much more ignorant than they now are.

We need not further explain the general causes which impaired the independence and purity of the ancient boroughs. As it would have been somewhat difficult to find in old times enough boroughs that were proper to choose representatives; as the best had not been chosen—perhaps had not been searched for; as in the actual boroughs the best people to be voters had not been selected as such; as in most of them the electing constituency was very small;—it is no wonder that most of these boroughs fell more or less under the control of rich men who considered the franchise of the borough a part of their own property.

With the counties the case was somewhat different; as yet there was no Chandos clause, the forty-shilling freehold was as yet the only title to a vote. Yeomen with such freeholds were as yet numerous, in many counties very numerous, and were still sturdy and independent. The inferior gentry were not always much disposed to submit to the dictation of lord or duke. In the last century, the county franchise was always considered as the free and independent element; those who wished to purify the legislature, always proposed to augment that element, and saw no other means of obtaining what they wished for.

But even the counties were in former times far less inde-

pendent than, from the nature of the legal franchise—from the paper description of it—we should suppose. Our county society has always been an aristocratic society; and in the last century aristocracy was a power of which it is difficult in these days of free manners and careless speech to realise the force. Society had then, far more than now, a simple, regular, recognised structure; each class had its place: it looked up to the classes above it; it would have thought it wrong to vie with them, or even to imitate them. Each class was to a certain extent independent; each went its own way on its own affairs, attended to the transactions of its own calling and the details of its own life: but each had a tendency, such as we can hardly now imagine, to be guided, impelled, and governed by those who were above them on all questions and in all matters which concerned or seemed to concern all classes equally. The real distinction between classes, too, was then an infinitely greater one than it now is. The aristocratic class was the most educated class, had access to the best society; was, as a whole, by far the most polished and cultivated class in the nation. For good and for evil, noblemen had a power then to which there is nothing comparable, scarcely any thing analogous, now. Amusing illustrations of this occur in the documents of the time. Thus Burke, in a memorandum on East Indian affairs, addressed to the noblemen and gentlemen who composed the Rockingham party, proposes the following scheme: "With regard to the Bank [of England], which is the grand instrument of the Court on this occasion, might it not be proper (if possible) that some of you of the greatest property should resolve to have nothing to do with their paper? There are five or six of you that would frighten them." If the territorial influence of the aristocracy was supposed to be so powerful in Threadneedle Street, we may easily suppose what it must have been in their own counties, at their own doors. The county contests of the last century had a continued tendency to become family conflicts between one noble house and another. The political questions of the day were merged in the intensity of the aristocratic, and perhaps hereditary feud.

Such was the representation of England; and it seems re-

stricted enough; but that of Scotland was even more restricted still, and more subject to illegitimate influence. Even the stoutest defenders of the old system of representation before 1832 used to own that the Scotch system could only be defended as "part of a whole," and that taken by itself it was absurd. There were in theory in Scotland thirty county members and fifteen borough members; but the franchise had in both of them been narrowed to an almost inconceivable extent. In 1812 the whole county constituency only amounted to 1235, and the whole borough constituency to 1253. The franchise in the counties was restricted to the tenants-in-chief of the Crown; all proprietors (the feudal law in theory still prevailed) who held from a subject were disfranchised, though a very large portion of the county was owned by them. The result was much about the same as if in England the county member had been chosen, not by the 40*s.* freeholders, but the lords of the manor. The franchise was practically as confined in Scotland as that restriction would have made it here. The borough franchise, too, was possessed by the members of the town councils of the various boroughs exclusively; no other persons had a share in it. The burghs were, as now, divided into districts; in each district the town council of each burgh contained in it named a delegate, and by the majority of these delegates the member for the district was chosen. Edinburgh alone had the honour of a separate representation; and its constituency amounted in number to *thirty-three.*

What degree of independence such small constituencies may have possessed in England or in Scotland, we cannot now accurately know. Even to those who knew the places best, it must have been sometimes difficult to determine it with accuracy. Influence is in its very nature somewhat secret; we cannot tell whence it precisely comes, by what exact channels it acts, or in what direction it is tending. Any estimate which can be formed of the degree in which the constituencies of the last century, such as we have described them, were either dependent or independent, must be very vague. The public at large knew very little on the subject; and no one took the trouble to note down in detail and with precision, that which they did

know. A general notion of the practical results may, however, be easily formed. In the year 1773, Dean Tucker observed in a letter to Lord Shelburne:—

"Your lordship has the command of two boroughs already; and the public shrewdly suspect that you would have no qualms of conscience against commanding two more, or even twenty-two. Mr. Fox and Lord Holland's family command one; the late Marquis of Rockingham had at least two, which he might, and did, call *his own;* and were I to proceed after the same manner throughout the peerage and the great landed interest, also the commercial and the manufacturing interest of the realm, perhaps I might enumerate not less than two hundred, namely boroughs and cities, and even counties, whose voters choose representatives and return members to Parliament more according to the good-will and pleasure of those who have the ascendency over them than according to their own private judgments or personal determinations."

As there were at that time no Irish members, the number of members of Parliament was 558; and as almost all constituencies had then two members each, this estimate would give about 400 to the class of nominated and dependent members, and about 158 to that of the independent. This calculation, rough as it evidently is, and imperfect as the data for making it evidently were, corresponds sufficiently well with a very elaborate calculation made forty years later:—

Members returned by 87 peers in England and Wales . .	218
„ „ 21 „ Scotland	31
„ „ 36 „ Ireland	51
Total returned by peers	300
Members returned by 90 commoners in England and Wales	137
„ „ 14 „ Scotland . . .	14
„ „ 19 „ Ireland . . .	20
„ nominated by Government	16
Total returned by commoners and Government .	187
Total returned by nomination	487
Independent of nomination	171
Total of the House of Commons	658[1]

[1] The above estimate is taken from Dr. Oldfield's *Representative History*, a work in many respects entitled to respect, but by no means impartial. The representation of Ireland, though not free from great defects had been exceedingly improved at the time of the union with England.

Whatever doubts might be suggested—and doubtless some might be suggested—as to the details of this estimate, its main conclusion may be considered to be certain. A large preponderant majority of the members of the House of Commons were, in one way or in another, nominated by noblemen and gentlemen; and only a minority were elected by the popular constituencies. The majority of the House of Commons represented the views and feelings of a particular and peculiar class; the minority only were elected by constituencies which could be supposed to choose representatives for all the other classes.

Such was in bare outline the old electoral system of England; and we may describe it by a startling phrase: it was a representation, so to say, of *select constituencies*. This is not the light in which we have been used to regard it. We speak by tradition of borough-mongers with dislike, and of rotten boroughs with contempt. From circumstances which we shall soon see, neither have left a good name in history. Most of us are the children of those who destroyed them; the leaders of our great parties are still those who were foremost in doing so. We naturally do not think well of them. But what were they? They were proprietary constituencies; they were, in truth, *higher* class constituencies; they gave a representation to persons of greater wealth, of greater education, and presumably, therefore, of greater political capacity, than the mass of the nation. We have, apparently at least, the best means of judging of their effects. Being, as we have seen, the preponderant element in the electoral system, the members chosen by them were the preponderant element in the House of Commons. They were the ruling power in the State. How, then, did this system, so singularly and irregularly composed, in fact work? We have the general results in history. The only difficulty, and it is not a slight one, is to understand them rightly and explain them briefly.

In the first great quality of a representative government, we may say boldly that, up to a late period of its existence, and with an exception or two which we shall specify, this system worked very well. The first requisite of a representa-

tive system is, that the representative body should represent the real public opinion of the nation. Nor is this so easy a matter as some imagine. There are nations which *have* no public opinion. The having it requires what a pedantic writer might call the *co-ordination of judgments*. Some people must be recognised to be wiser than others are. In every district there must be people generally admitted by the judgment of their neighbours to have more sense, more instructed minds, more cultured judgments, than others have. Such persons will not naturally or inevitably, or in matter of fact, agree in opinion; on the contrary, they will habitually differ: great national questions will divide the nation; great parties will be formed. But the characteristic of a nation capable of public opinion is, that those parties will be *organised;* in each there will be a leader, in each there will be some looked up to, and many who look up to them: the opinion of the party will be formed and suggested by the few, it will be criticised and accepted by the many. It has always been the peculiarity of the history of England, that it has been capable of a true public opinion in this its exact and proper sense. There has ever been a *structure* in English political society: every man has not walked by the light of his own eyes; the less instructed have not deemed themselves the equals of the more instructed; the many have subordinated their judgment to that of the few. They have not done so blindly, for there has always been a spirit of discussion in our very air: still they have done so—opinions have always *settled down* from the higher classes to the lower; and in that manner, whenever the nation has been called on to decide, a decision that is really national has been formed.

On the whole, the English constitution of the last century, in its best time, and before the occurrence of changes which we shall soon describe, gave an excellent expression to the public opinion of England. It gave a ruling discretion to those whom the nation at large most trusted; it provided a simple machinery for ascertaining with accuracy the decisions at which the few had arrived, and in which the mass concurred.

This constitution was submitted to no ordinary test. We have so long outlived the contests of the last century, that we have forgotten their intensity. We look on it as a very quiet time; and we contrast it with the apprehensive, and changeful, and anxious period in which it seems to us that we are living. Of the middle of the eighteenth century this is a true idea, at least of part of it; but the English Government during the early part of the century was tried by what is probably the severest of all trials to the foundations of an hereditary and constitutional government—by a struggle between two claimants to the throne, each of whom represented a principle. We know well the arguments of the side which has gained; but we do not always remember the moral strength of the side which lost. The Jacobites had much in their creed which appealed to the predominating principles of the English nature—an hereditary family, which claimed the Crown, not on arguable considerations of policy, but on ascertainable claims of descent which embodied, not a speculation, but a fact; which had prescription in its favour, and was in harmony with a country almost all whose other institutions were prescriptive; which had on its side the associations with the maintenance of order and the security of property, as claimants by prescription must have; which appealed to the Conservative instinct, which is always so strong in a people over whom the visible world rules so much; which appealed to the loyal instincts, which have a great influence over a people in whom a strong but impressed imagination profoundly works;—such a family must have had a singular hold on the popular attachments of England. History proves that they had that hold; and that they only lost England by an incapacity for action, and an inherent perversity of judgment, that seem to have been hereditary in the race. In the last act of the drama, during the first few years of the House of Hanover, the Stuart dynasty had still great influence in the country. They were not, indeed, in possession; and as the strength of their adherents was among the most Conservative classes, they could not regain possession; but if we could fancy them, by any freak of fortune, to have been reinstated, there would have

been incredible difficulty in expelling them once more. Possibly it could not have been done, certainly it could not have been done if the fanatical hatred of the majority of Englishmen to Popery had not co-operated with the attachment to freedom —if a sentiment which actuated the masses had not been on the same side with the convictions which influenced the few. If the hereditary heir to the Crown had been once seated on the throne, and had consented to be converted, or to seem to be converted to Protestantism, the chances of the Hanoverian family would have been small and feeble.

Just before the demise of Queen Anne, the prospects of the Jacobite party had much to captivate sanguine and short-sighted men. The female favourite of the Queen—the reigning favourite we may call her—was indisputably on their side: the Queen, who had the strongest motives to be decidedly opposed to them, was not so; her suppressed inclination—perhaps her latent conscience—was in their favour: the first ministers of the Crown, if they had no "settled intention," to use Bolingbroke's distinction, had floating notions and vague "views" on the same side. In the nation at large, the inferior gentry—those of whom the Tory foxhunter of Addison is an admirable memorial—were half Jacobite; the real clergy (the Whig historian calls them "a curse rather than a blessing to those over whom they were set"[1]) were more than half Jacobite; the lower class of the people—the No-Popery antipathy apart—would perhaps have inclined more to the house of Stuart than to the house of Hanover. Legitimacy is a popular title, loyalty touches the heart; the rule of a single monarch is an intelligible thing; the least educated can and do understand it; but the rule of Parliament, and the idea of a constitution, are difficult to imagine; the lower orders of people hardly ever understand them or comprehend them. The only classes over whom the attachment to the Act of Settlement and to the constitution, such as it then existed, was really strong, were two: the higher gentry, including the nobility in that word; and the mercantile and trading classes—the "fund-

[1] Hallam.

holders," as the Tory squires of that age called them, and fancied that they were.

It is evident that a very peculiar Parliamentary constitution was required to give an expression to the real will of the nation, when the classes composing it were so divided, and when the very principle and nature of the government of the country was in dispute. What, indeed, it may be said, was the will of the country? The classes which have been specified did not agree in opinion, nor would one of them avowedly and explicitly agree to yield to the opinion of the class opposed to it. The squire would never have admitted that the fundholder was wiser than himself, nor would the fundholder have paid the least deference to the notions of the squire. The fact of the one having an opinion, would rather have tended to prevent the other from adopting it. How, then, was a national decision—a truly national decision—possible? It was possible in this way. The dissentient classes, as we may call those over whom Jacobitism and the extreme Toryism had the greatest influence—the rural gentry and the rural clergy—both yielded deference and homage, and to a certain extent confidence, to the higher gentry and the nobility, under whom, it may be said, they lived, near whose estates they were born, and who were the unquestioned heads of all the society to which they belonged. On political topics this was especially the case. Rugged prejudice of course existed, and "my lord" was not always liked; still it could not but be felt that he knew more of the world, had access to better information, had enjoyed more of what were then the rare opportunities of travelling and education, than the lower gentry had. He possessed all the means of judging which they had, and others too. A certain deference was paid then to rank which is not paid to it now, because the inherent difference between the highest orders and others in manners and in mind was much greater than any that exist at present. A national decision was then possible, and was then attained, because the classes who were the most likely to dissent, and who in reality did dissent, from what the rest of the nation wished, were precisely the classes most under the control of, and most likely

to submit to, the moral influence of those who were above them.

Such being the state of the nation in the earlier part of the last century, there was an evident difficulty in giving a just expression to it. Scarcely any of the ordinary modes of government which theorists have suggested, or which continental nations have tried, would have succeeded in giving it. The most intelligent classes, those who were disposed to support the House of Hanover and the principles of liberty, were, as we have explained, the trading classes and the higher gentry. The class most confided in by the nation was the higher gentry and the nobility. Fortunately, the most trusted class was a portion of the most intelligent class: the chosen leaders of the country were a part at least of those whom it was best for it to choose for its leaders; the actual guides were some of the best guides who could be found. But what constitutional arrangements would be adapted to give them by law that guidance? In what manner could the indefinite and vague deference of the people be shaped and fashioned into a polity?

Any system of democratic suffrage, we may at once say, would have been unfitted for that end. The classes into whose hands it would have thrown the power were the lower classes, who could not be expected to have any intelligent appreciation of freedom, and in fact had none. Anything like universal suffrage would have been an enormous addition to the influence of the rural clergy and the smaller squires. These two classes, being resident in the country, being known to the lowest classes, distributing all the casual advantages which they had any chance of receiving, adjudging all the petty penalties of the local law which they had any risk of incurring, must have had preponderating influence over the rural population. They would have brought down from scattered villages and petty hamlets regiments of voters for the Stuart dynasty, who knew nothing of the real merits of the controversy to be decided, who were utterly ignorant of the very meaning of constitutional government, who could have given no account of the very nature and structure of

Parliament, but who knew that the only educated persons they ever met, the only influential persons they ever saw—the parson of their own village, and the squire of it—had told them to do that which they were doing. We should have then seen in England that which we now see in France. The uneducated majority would have pronounced their decision; the country would have been forced to recognise it; the law would have been compelled to enforce it. Instead of living under the constitution which we now have, we might, and probably should, have been living under a Jacobite despotism, sanctioned by the preponderant, we might say almost by the unanimous, vote of the rural population.

It may be objected, however, that the deference which we have admitted that the rural clergy and the lesser squires bore to the higher gentry would have prevented this result. It may be said that, although they would have by law possessed the power of influencing in the last resort the national destiny and deciding on the national constitution, they would not in practice have done so; that they would have given up their own judgments, and would have been guided by the opinions of the classes whom they knew, and whom they admitted, to be their superiors. But experience shows that this is an error, and that those who entertain it have a mistaken view of a very important part of human nature. If you give people uncontrolled power, real, *bonâ fide*, tangible, felt power, they will exercise it according to their own notions. Of course this is only true of classes which *have* notions. An ignorant peasantry, for example, have none; if you give them nominal political power, you do not give them anything they can understand, or appreciate, or use. It is not real power to them; it has none of the effectiveness of power in their hands: it is an instrument they cannot employ to obtain any preconceived result; they are bewildered about its nature; they do not know what they are doing when they are exerting it; it is not anything they can prize, and use, and enjoy. But a class of gentry or clergy—a moderately educated class of any sort—is not in this position. It has views, opinions, wishes of its own: those views may be narrow, those opinions erron-

eous, those wishes foolish; but they have them. They are attached to them. If power is put into their hands, they will try to carry them out in action. Under a constitution which did not give them predominant power, the Tory squire and the Tory clergy were ready to give up their vague opinions and their floating predilections; but if they had been invested with a constitutional authority and a legislative omnipotence, they would never have given those opinions and predilections up, or imagined that they could give them up; they would have stiffened them into a compact creed, and tried to realise them under the despotism of the Stuarts.

It is therefore certain that no system of universal suffrage, or of very diffused and popular suffrage, would have secured the maintenance of the House of Hanover and the security of English liberty. The lower classes would themselves probably have been on the other side; and whether that be so or not, the persons who had the greatest, the surest, and the most diffused influence over them were indisputably on the other side for the most part.

It is certain, too, that no system of uniform but not universal suffrage which would have been endured by the country would have given at that time a real expression to the will of the country. As we have explained, the real opinion of the country was in accordance with the opinion of the wealthier trading and mercantile classes. They were zealous for the House of Hanover; the nation, though not zealous for it, was favourable to it. By establishing a high and uniform qualification for votes in large boroughs, and by giving a very considerable number of members to those large boroughs, it would have been possible, though it would have been difficult, to secure a Parliament with an opinion substantially in accordance with the decision of the nation. It would have been difficult, for the great towns were then few and scattered; the north of England, which now teems with them, was then a poor district, not only in comparison with what it now is, but also with many parts of the south as it was at that time. Still, by such a system as we have suggested, it would have been *possible* to throw the leading

authority of the nation into the hands of the large towns, and into the hands of the richer persons in those towns. In practice, however, no such constitution would have been endured. The Tory gentleman would not have endured to be put under the yoke of the "fundholder" or the manufacturer. The clergy would never have endured a subjection to the class among whom Dissent had the greatest hold, and possibly a preponderating influence. To have attempted to have placed the country under the rule of the commercial classes in towns and cities, would have been a greater revolution than the change of the dynasty itself; it would have shocked the prejudices of the nation at large; it never suggested itself even to those very classes themselves.

Thus all ordinary systems of suffrage bring out one or other of two results. They would *either* have thrown preponderating and conclusive power into the hands of the lesser gentry and the clergy, *or* they would have thrown an equal and similar power into the hands of the manufacturers and merchants. The first result would have been easy: England was then a predominantly agricultural country, and it would have been very easy to frame a system of suffrage which would give the ordinary squire and the ordinary clergyman —the ruling classes in agricultural society then as now—a large predominance. Any system which gave what would seem in theory its due weight to the counties would have had that effect. A system might have been suggested which would have given enormous power to the large towns. But both these systems would have been inadequate to the end desired. That which gave preponderance to the ordinary landholder would have represented rather the tradition of Toryism than the present decision of the living nation; that which gave a preponderance to manufacturers and traders would have been offensive to almost all the country; it would have been unendurable by many classes of it; it would not have been, in fact, a government, for it could not have governed a country in which it had no root, and to whose keenest prejudices it was adverse.

The system which was in fact adopted obviated these

defects. Its peculiar nature threw preponderant power into the hands of the higher gentry and the nobility. The smaller boroughs had fallen by a kind of necessity of nature into their hands; their influence in the counties was preponderant, if not overwhelming. As we have explained, this class was the one most trusted by the nation, which was universally believed to have the greatest political intelligence, whose opinions in matter of fact were coincident with those of all the most intelligent classes. Under any other system of representation, it would not have been possible to give to this class preponderant power. It is not in the nature of any extended system of suffrage to give to a small upper class any very considerable amount of power. Their numbers are few, and their votes are immeasurably outnumbered by the votes of their inferiors. It is not possible to establish in any country a system of uniform suffrage so narrow and so high as to give to this small upper class a preponderant authority in the country. It seems ridiculous in a popular government to give votes to a very few persons only; and as soon as any uniform system of suffrage is extended beyond those few, it gives decisive predominance to the many, and on that very account withdraws it from the less numerous but more educated orders.

In this way, therefore, we think it certain that in the earlier part of the last century the old system of representation, by throwing into the hands of a peculiar and influential class the predominant authority in the State, was more beneficial to the nation than a more diffused and popular system would have been. The materials for the creation of constituencies both numerous and intelligent, both well educated and influential, did not exist. The practical choice was between an uninstructed number and a select few: our constitution gave the preponderance to the latter; and in the great struggle between the House of Stuart and the House of Hanover—between the principle of legitimacy and the principle of freedom—the consequences were beneficial and were decisive. It not only secured the authority of a free Government, but the ease with which it did so has disguised from us the diffi-

culties with which it contended. The victory was so complete, that the recollection of the conflict is confused.

With that struggle, however, the singular usefulness of the old system of representation certainly ended. We do not think that, in the remaining part of the history of the eighteenth century, it gave at all a better expression to the national opinion than any other system would have done. Various writers have made charges against the English Government on account of the wars which marked the period; but we think unjustly. On the whole, no nation of equal strength, of equal courage and of equal pride, has ever in the history of the world pursued a course so tranquil. We were entangled in a Spanish war; we were induced by our Hanoverian connections to intermeddle unnecessarily in Germany; we were at war occasionally, as in every century we have from time to time been, with France: but none of these wars were wars of ambition. We wished when at war for national glory: we were not sorry to go to war because we thought we might gain glory in it; but we never went to war with a distinct desire for territorial aggrandisement. We have never had in our national character any principle of aggression. We have no such settled inciting motive. On the contrary, we wish that every one shall have his own—shall retain whatever he has already by right or by prescription; though we are jealous—jealous even to slaying—of any one who by hint, allusion, or suggestion, throws a doubt upon our own title to anything which we already have. We are by nature unwilling to relinquish, though we are not desirous to acquire.

The actual Government of the last century carried out these principles fairly and well; but it is probable that any other Government which the English people would have borne would have done so equally. A more democratic Government would perhaps have been more warlike; but an English democracy will probably never be very warlike; it will never engage in a continued series of intentional aggressions; least of all would it have done so in the last century, when there was no struggle in Europe which could arouse the

popular passions, and no cause which could interest profoundly the popular imagination. The wars of Protestantism had passed away, and the wars of Jacobinism had not yet begun. It is possible that a more democratic Government would, with its inherent aggressive instincts, have interfered somewhat more in the petty wars of circumstance and occasion which complicate the history of the last century, and make it so tedious to us now. But we did interfere a good deal in them as it was. For an aristocracy, ours has never been a pacific aristocracy. It is in many ways their boast, their pride, and their merit, that they have less of the distinctive peculiarities of an aristocracy than any other which has ever existed; they claim justly to have a more popular interest, and a more vigorous sympathy. The blame that attaches to them is similar: they have shown the same qualities in the defects of their Government; they have had but little of the refining, calculating, diplomatic habit which usually characterises the policy of an hereditary class that has much to lose in war, and much to enjoy in peace. The English aristocracy is the most warlike of great aristocracies, and the English nation is the least warlike of free nations. Few of the many threads of union which so richly pervade our social system have been more influential than this one. We have had much of martial manliness where we should have expected but little; we have had much of apathetic indifference where we might have looked for an aggressive passion. The warmth above has been greater, and that below less, than a theorist would have expected; and therefore our social fabric has been more equable in temperature than we should have ventured to predict.

In the quiet times, therefore, of the middle part of the eighteenth century there is no particular reason for believing that our old system gave a much better or a much worse representation to the national voice than any other system might have been expected to give. In the more troubled times of the American war and the French war, there is even less reason to think that any other system would have varied much the course of our policy. We should have tried

to conquer America under any Government; and we should have tried to resist the aggressive proselytism of France under any Government. We may form our own opinions now of the expediency, the justice, or the possibility of these attempts; we may think that the American war showed national narrow-mindedness, and the French war showed national irritability; but the indubitable fact remains, that both the one and the other were popular in their day, and that both were thoroughly acceptable to the community at large as well as to the aristocracy.

There is, however, great and conclusive reason to believe that, during the later period of its existence, the old system of representation had an inherent defect peculiar to itself, which, if it did not disqualify it altogether for giving a correct embodiment to national opinion, made it much less likely than most other systems of representation to do so perfectly. The social condition of England had undergone a series of very extensive changes between the time of the accession of the House of Hanover and the year 1832. A new world—a world of industry and manufacture—had been created; new interests had arisen; new modes of thought had been awakened; new habits of mind had been engendered. The mercantile and manufacturing classes, which had risen to influence, were naturally unrecognised by the ancient constitution; they lived under its protection, but they were unknown to its letter; they had thoughts which it did not take account of, and ideas with which it was inconsistent. The structure of English society was still half feudal, and its new elements were utterly unfeudal. It was impossible to subject Lancashire, such as it became, to the dominion of any aristocracy, however ancient and long-descended it might be. Such rulers were not fitted for such subjects, nor were such subjects fitted for such rulers. Between the two classes there was a contrast which made the higher unintelligible to the lower, and the lower disagreeable to the higher. Education, moreover, was diffusing itself. The political intelligence of the aristocratic classes was no longer so superior to that of other classes as it had formerly been. The necessary means of

information were more widely accessible than they had been, and were very extensively used. The contrast between the constitution of England and England itself in consequence became day by day greater and greater, and at last became unendurable. We have not space to go into detail on this part of the subject, and it is not necessary to go into detail about it. If it had not been for the terror excited throughout Europe by the French revolution, the old system of Parliamentary representation could hardly by possibility have lasted as long as it did. In the end it passed away; and the recollection of the evils of its latter time has obscured the remembrance of its former usefulness. As we have shown, it long gave us a Parliament coincident in judgment with the nation; it maintained upon the throne the dynasty under which we live, and secured the foundations of English liberty. It long worked well, and if at last it worked ill, the excuses for its doing so were many. It had survived all that was akin to it, and was in contact with everything which was most discordant to it. A constitution which was adapted to the England of 1700 must necessarily have been adapted to the England of 1832. Changes so momentous as there had been between those years in our society required and enforced an equivalent alteration in our polity.

Such is the general result of this long examination of our old system of representation in the main quality of a representative system—that by which above all others it must stand or fall—its coincidence with the *real* national opinion. We see that this is a mixed and a complicated, but not on the whole an unsatisfactory one. We will now shortly examine our old system in three other respects. Did it give a means of expression to the views of all classes? Did it secure to us really strong administrations? Did it train for us efficient statesmen? If we can in any way answer these questions, it will, we think, be admitted that we have discussed the most important part of the subject, and examined our former system of representation by the tests that are most stringent and satisfactory.

In the second requisite of the representative system, that

which existed in England in the last century must be considered to have been successful. It gave a means of expression to all classes whose minds required an expression. The mercantile and trading class had not, as we have just explained, their due weight in the system of government; they did not regulate all that they should have regulated, or control all that they should have controlled; but they had always the means of expressing their sentiments. They had not, especially in the later times, a representation proportioned to their intelligence and their influence; but they always had *some* representation. The gentry were not only represented, but over-represented. Especially during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the first few years of the nineteenth, their influence was unreasonably great, and their despotism absolute. They ruled the country without check and without resistance; they were subject only to a weak and modified remonstrance; they had but to listen in the House of Commons to the speeches of those whom they could immeasurably outvote; they had but to quell out of doors the unrecognised murmurs of an unorganised multitude, which had long obeyed them, which was still ready to obey them, which did not know its own power.

With respect to the lowest class of all, the working of our own system of representation is peculiarly instructive. That system, by its letter, attempted to throw a good deal of power into their hands. In a great number of boroughs the suffrage, as we have seen, was practically all but universal; all inhabitant householders not receiving alms very frequently had votes. What is now so much desired, the representation of the working-classes, then really existed. In Stafford, in Coventry, and in other places, the lowest classes were preponderant. Those classes had then the means of making their voice heard, and their sentiments known in Parliament. They had some influence in the State, though they did not rule the State. In theory our constitution was at that time in this point perfect. As we read the description of it, we believe that nothing could be better. In practice it was a failure. The trial of the experiment demonstrated that it is useless to provide means for expressing the political thoughts of classes

who have no such thoughts. The freemen of Stafford and Coventry did not send to Parliament members who really and truly expressed the opinions and sentiments of the working-classes, because the working-classes had no opinion on matters of legislation and administration, and had only vague ideas of what was passing in their time. For the most part, they used the power which was given to them, not as an opportunity of influence, but as a source of income. They did not think of it as something by which they could control the rich, but as something which they could sell to the rich. Sheridan has left an amusing document as to the constituency of Stafford. They probably did not expect that so unbusinesslike a person should have preserved so businesslike a document; but it is as follows:—

R. B. Sheridan, Esq. Expenses at the Borough of Stafford for Election anno 1784.

248 Burgesses, paid £5 5 0 each					£1302	0 0
Yearly Expenses since.						
	£	s.	d.			
House-rent and taxes . .	23	6	6			
Servant at 6s. per week board wages	15	12	0			
Ditto, yearly wages . . .	8	8	0			
Coals, etc.	10	0	0			
				57 6 6		
Ale-tickets	40	0	0			
Half the member's plate . .	25	0	0			
Swearing young burgesses .	10	0	0			
Subscription to the Infirmary	5	5	0			
Ditto clergymen's widows .	2	2	0			
Ringers	4	4	0			
				86 11 0		
One year				143 17 6		
Multiplied by years . .				6		
					863	5 0
Total expense of six years' Parliament, exclusive of expense incurred during the time of election and your own annual expenses					£2165	5 0

Corruption of this kind, and perhaps sometimes greater in degree, prevailed in almost every town in which the suffrage

was very extended. As the wealth of the country grew, the price of votes became greater. If the old system of representation had endured till now, we can scarcely estimate how great it would by this time have become. Experience proved what our theories suggest, that the enfranchisement of the corruptible is in truth the establishment of corruption.

In one respect, however, the representation of the working-classes which we formerly had in this country may be considered to have been successful. The towns in which the suffrage was practically universal at times sent to the House of Commons, not spokesmen of their own grievances, but spokesmen of grievances in general. Sir Francis Burdett is but the type, and the best-known instance, of a whole class of members who, in former times, were always ready to state any one's complaints, without much inquiry whether they were true; to bring forward a case, without much asking whether it were very well founded; to make a general declamation about the sufferings of the country which was a kind of *caveat* against abuses in general, and might be construed as a protest against any particular one which chanced to occur. Such undiscriminating and vague invectives had their use. They prevented gross instances of administrative harshness—at least they tended to prevent them. They prevented the air of politics from becoming stagnant; they broke the monotony of class domination. But it may be questioned whether, on the whole, their influence was beneficial. These reckless orators had but little moral weight; they were too ready with their statements to get them trusted, they were too undiscriminating in their objections for those objections to have influence. A weak Opposition is commonly said to be more advantageous to a Government than no Opposition at all; it gives an impression to the public that all which can be said against the plans of the Cabinet has been said; it gives an impression that what is unchecked is checked, that what is uncontrolled is controlled. It diminishes the practical responsibility of an administration, by diminishing the popular conception of its power. In the same way, the vague demagogues who occasionally appeared in the old House of

Commons did not weaken the substantial power of the classes that ruled there. They were "his Majesty's" objectors. It was their province to say that whatever was done was done wrong. It was not therefore of much consequence what the administration did. They were sure of its being opposed, they were sure of its being carried; and they had therefore the advantage of complete power without the odium of enforcing silence. A despotism disguised in this manner is perhaps more uncontrolled than any other despotism:—such, however, was the mode in which the attempt of our old system of representation to give special members to the lowest classes really operated. It failed in what may be considered its characteristic function. The ideas of the lowest classes on politics were still unheard in the legislature, because those classes had no ideas. A confused popular feeling sometimes sent popular orators to Parliament. But the kind of indiscriminate objection and monotonous invective which those orators made use of without ceasing, seem to have been rather an assistance than an obstruction to the governing classes. The lesson of the whole history indubitably is, that it is in vain to lower the level of political representation beneath the level of political capacity; that below that level you may easily give nominal power, but cannot possibly give real power; that at best you give a vague voice to an unreasoning instinct, that in general you only give the corruptible an opportunity to become corrupt.

It is often said, and commonly believed, that the old system of representation secured, under almost all circumstances, the existence and the continuance of what is called a strong Government: it is believed that under that system the administration of the day had almost always the power to carry any legislative measure which it deemed beneficial, and to do any executive act which it might think fit. History, however, when it is accurately reviewed, affords little or no confirmation of this idea. Many parts of the history of England during the existence of our old constitution bear, on the very face of them, the most conspicuous evidence that there was then no security for the existence of a strong executive Government.

Many administrations during the last century, so far from being pre-eminently powerful, were not moderately coherent. The earlier part of George the Third's reign is simply the history of a series of feeble Governments, which had little power to act as they intended, or to legislate as they desired. The traditional notion of the strength of Governments in former times is founded upon the enormous strength of the administrations which successively directed the long struggle with France and Napoleon. The French revolution frightened the English nation; it haunted the people of that generation so much, that they could not look anywhere but they imagined they saw the traces of it. Priestley interpreted the prophecies by means of it; Mitford wrote Grecian history by the aid of it. If its effect was so striking in the out-of-the-way parts of literature, in politics its effect might well be expected to be extreme. It *was* extreme. The English people were terrified into unity. They ceased to be divided into Parliamentary sections, as their fathers were divided, or as their grandchildren are now divided. The process by which the unanimity of the nation created a corresponding unanimity in the House of Commons was simple and was effectual. The noblemen and gentlemen who had the greatest influence in the counties, and a certain number of whom were proprietors of boroughs—the class which, as we have seen, had a despotic control over the House of Commons as it then was—felt the antipathy to French principles as much as any other class; perhaps they did not feel it more, though some persons have thought they did, than the rest of the nation; but they undoubtedly did not feel it less. The Parliament was as united in its dislike to Jacobinism, and in its resistance to Napoleon, as the nation was; and it could not be more so. The large majorities, therefore, of the administrations of Mr. Pitt and Lord Liverpool, are not attributable to any peculiar excellence in the Parliamentary constitution of that period; any tolerable system of Parliamentary representation would equally have produced them; the country was too united for even an approximate representation of it not to be so.

It is undoubtedly, however, believed by very many persons

that the old system of representation contained a peculiar machinery for securing the strength of the executive. This theory, it has been well observed, constituted the "esoteric doctrine of the Tory party. The celebrated question asked by the Duke of Wellington, 'How is the king's Government to be carried on if the bill passes?' which has since received a practical answer, indicates without concealment the real view of English government entertained by him and his party. They held that if the majority of the House of Commons consisted of persons not nominated by great borough proprietors, but freely chosen by genuine popular election, the Government could not be carried on. They believed it to be necessary that a Government should repose upon an immovable phalanx of members for close boroughs; and that the members returned for open seats should be a minority, who would confine themselves to criticising the Government in their speeches, without being able to shake its stability by their votes."[1] In this conception there was, indeed, an obvious difficulty: it provided that a large majority in Parliament should be always maintained by the close union of the members for the smaller boroughs. But who was to keep those members themselves united? They represented only the proprietors of their respective seats, and who was to keep either them or those proprietors always of one mind? If the nation at large was divided, why should not these persons partake of the division? The advocates of this theory had a ready answer; they said that the proprietors of the boroughs, and the members for them, were to be kept on the side of the Government by means of the patronage of the Government; they thought that places should be offered to the borough owners and to the borough members for their friends and for themselves; and that in this way they might be kept united, and be always induced to support the administration. This theory was not a theory merely; it was reduced to practice by several Prime Ministers—by the Duke of Newcastle, by Sir Robert Walpole, and by others. Those who tried it had undoubtedly a great advantage; they had the materials that were needful, they had the patronage.

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, Jan. 1859.

We have no space to inquire how the establishments of the last century came to be so cumbrous; but most cumbrous they were. We are amazed nowadays at the names of the old sinecures, at the number of half-useless places, at what seems the childish lavishness of the public offices; but this profusion, though not perhaps created for a purpose, was used for a purpose. Old feudal offices, which had once served to mark the favour or the gratitude of the Crown, were employed as a kind of purchase-money to buy the adhesion of Parliamentary proprietors: peerages, too, were used to the same end; all the available resources of the age, were, in truth, concentrated upon it. In part this consistent exertion of very great means of influence was effectual; sometimes it really did make a Government strong; and some writers, who have not duly weighed the facts of history, have believed that it always must do so: but there are in its very nature three fundamental defects, which must always hinder its working for a long period with constant efficiency.

In the first place, the theory of this machinery is that the patronage of the Crown is to be used to purchase votes. But *who* is to use the patronage? The theory assumes that it is to be used by the Minister of the day. According to it, the head of the party which is predominant in Parliament is to employ the patronage of the Crown for the purpose of confirming that predominance. But suppose that the Crown chooses to object to this; suppose that the king for the time being should say, "This patronage is mine; the places in question are places in my service; the pensions in question are pensions from me: I will myself have at least some share in the influence that is acquired by the conferring of those pensions, and the distribution of those places". George III. actually did say this. He was a king in one respect among a thousand: he was willing to do the work of a Secretary of the Treasury; his letters for very many years are filled with the petty details of patronage; he directed who should have what, and stipulated who should not have anything. This interference of the king must evidently in theory, and did certainly in fact, destroy the efficiency of the alleged expedient. Very much of the patronage of the

Crown went, not to the adherents of the Prime Minister, because they were his adherents, but to the king's friends, because they were his friends. Many writers have been very severe on George III. for taking the course which he did take, and have frequently repeated the well-known maxims which show that what he did was a deviation from the constitution. Very likely it was; but what is the use of a constitution which takes no account of the ordinary motives of human nature? It was inevitable that an ambitious king, who had industry enough to act as he did, would so act. Let us consider his position. He was invested with authority which was apparently great. He was surrounded by noblemen and gentlemen who passed their life in paying him homage, and in professing perhaps excessive doctrines of loyal obedience to him. When the Duke of Devonshire, or the Duke of Bedford, or the Duke of Newcastle approached the royal closet, they implied by words and manners that the king had immeasurably more power than they had. In fact, it was expected that he should have immeasurably less. It was expected that, though these noblemen daily acknowledged that he was their superior, he should constantly act as if he were their inferior. The Prime Minister was, in reality, appointed by them, and it was expected that the king should do what the Prime Minister told him; that he should assent to measures on which he was not consulted; that he should make peace when Mr. Grenville said peace was right; that he should make war whenever Mr. Grenville said war was right; that he should allow the offices of his household and the dignitaries of his court to be used as a means for the support of Cabinets whose members he disliked, and whose policy he disapproved of. It is evident that no man who was not imbecile would be content with such a position. It is not difficult to bear to be without power, it is not very difficult to bear to have only the mockery of power; but it is unbearable to have real power, and to be told that you must content yourself with the mockery of it; it is unendurable to have in your hands an effectual instrument of substantial influence, and also to act day by day as a pageant, without any influence whatever. Human nature has never endured this, and we may

be quite sure that it never will endure it. It is a fundamental error in the "esoteric theory" of the Tory party, that it assumed the king and the Prime Minister to be always of the same mind, while they often were of different minds.

A still more remarkable defect in the so-called strength procured under the old system of representation by the use of patronage, was the *instability* of that strength. It especially failed at the moment at which it was especially wanted. A majority in Parliament which is united by a sincere opinion, and is combined to carry out that opinion, is in some sense secure. As long as that opinion is unchanged, it will remain; it can only be destroyed by weakening the conviction which binds it together. A majority which is obtained by the employment of patronage is very different; it is combined mainly by *an expectation*. Sir Robert Walpole, the great master in the art of dispensing patronage, defined gratitude as an anticipation of future favour; he meant that the majority which maintained his administration was collected, not by recollection, but by hope; they thought not so much of favours which were past as of favours which were to come. At a critical moment this bond of union was ordinarily weak. If the Minister of the day should fail, he would confer favours no longer; the patronage that was coveted would pass into the gift of the Minister who succeeded him. The expectation upon which a Minister's strength under the old system of representation was based, varied, therefore, with the probability that he would succeed. It was most potent when it was certain that the Minister would be victorious; it was weak and hesitating when it was dubious whether he might not be beaten and retire. In other words, that source of strength was prolific when it was not wanted; when it was wanted, it was scarcely perceptible. In a time of doubt and difficulty every member of such a majority inevitably distrusted his neighbour. If others deserted the Government, his support would be useless to the Minister, and pernicious to himself. A man who wanted places would wish to support, not the administration which was about to go out, but the administration which was just coming in. A curious example of this

tendency is preserved in the memoirs of Lord Rockingham. "I will go through," said the Duke of Newcastle, the Minister who was just going out—"I will go through the elections as well as I can, and endeavour to see what they (the Court) really intend. I think it is too late for them to do any mischief. They may be disagreeable, and defeat some of our friends, and act directly contrary to what they promised; but they can't now alter the tone and complexion of the new Parliament: that is all settled, and so far my staying in to this time has been of use." On the above letter the second Lord Hardwicke has made the following remark: "Notwithstanding the choice of the Parliament, which the Duke of Newcastle piques himself upon, they forsook him for Lord Bute when his standard was set up". Lord Bute was of course the Minister who was about to come in, and who, after a very brief interval, did come in. In like manner, much of the strength of Sir Robert Walpole passed to Mr. Pelham, and Mr. Addington succeeded to much of Mr. Pitt's. In these cases, as soon as it became pretty clear that the Minister of the day would soon cease to be such, almost all the Parliamentary following, which was procured by the expectation of receiving from him places and pensions, very rapidly melted away.

It was, of course, still more certain that when the Minister of the day had really ceased to be Minister, and was not likely to return, no one thought much about him. The power that was gained by the use of patronage was not only unstable in the popular sense of being weak and easily overthrown, but it was unstable also in the peculiar sense in which the mathematicians use that word, for when overthrown, it was very difficult to set it up again. It had not any intrinsic tendency to return of itself to the state of equilibrium. The best example of this is to be found in one of the features of the old system of representation which is most frequently regarded as strengthening the Government. There were certain boroughs called Treasury boroughs, in which there were dockyards or other Government establishments, and in which the administration for the time being had, as such, a predominant influence.

These boroughs ensured the Minister who was in power at each Parliamentary election some sixteen votes. But the singular insecurity of such a source of strength is very clear. The existence of it was a premium upon dissolutions. A new administration could certainly count in a new Parliament on diminishing their adversaries' strength by a considerable number of votes, and on augmenting their own strength by the same number of votes, also. When parties were equally divided, such a foundation of power could not but be weak. A Minister might possess it to-day; but if his adversary should come in and dissolve, it would cease to aid him, and begin to aid that adversary.[1]

This characteristic instability of a majority procured by patronage inevitably weakened the confidence of a Prime Minister in a struggle with the Crown. Theoretical writers have often blamed the successive Prime Ministers of George III. for permitting him to interfere with the distribution of what was, by the ordinary theory of the constitution, their patronage. But they could not help it. The king had at critical moments

[1] The following is the list given of the Government boroughs :—

Treasury.

Dartmouth	2	
Dover	1	
Harwich	2	
Hythe	2	
Windsor	1	
Hampshire	2	
Yarmouth (Norfolk)	1	
	—	11

Admiralty.

Queenborough	1	
Rochester	1	
Sandwich	2	
	—	4

Ordnance.

Queenborough	1	
	—	
Total number of members returned by Government in England and Wales only		16

The whole representation of Scotland was in much the same position.

the power of saying who should be Minister. He could at least, in times when the divisions were close and the Government was weak, at any moment transfer the purchasing power from the head of the administration to the leader of the Opposition. It was in consequence impossible for any Minister on dubious occasions to refuse the king a share in the patronage. If he did not concede some of it, he would in all likelihood lose the whole of it.

A third inherent defect in the administrative strength obtained by the use of patronage is its certain unpopularity. Mankind call it corruption. Refined reasoners may prove, or fancy they prove, that it is desirable; they may demonstrate that it is possiby in some degree inevitable; but they will never induce ordinary men to like it. Of all Governments, it is the least impressive to the popular imagination. It seems not only to have vice for its adjunct, but vice for its principle. All Governments are feeble which cannot appeal with confidence to the moral instincts of their subjects; but it appears almost impudent in this one to attempt to do so. It exists because it has successfully applied bad motives to men susceptible of bad motives. As the secret of its power appears to be base, it loses its hold over the loyalty of mankind. We have seen this exemplified in a conspicuous instance in France. The monarchy of Louis Philippe was weak because it was believed to be maintained by bribery and to be supported from immoral motives. The same cause long weakened, and was at last the chief agent in destroying, the long, prosperous, and able Ministry of Sir Robert Walpole. It was to no purpose that he governed well; it was to no purpose that he administered general affairs consummately, or that he regulated the finances wisely; it was to no purpose that he showed that those who opposed him were impelled to do so by very mean motives: no defensive considerations availed him. It was believed that his Government was maintained by corruption, and a kind of disgust gradually grew up towards it, long impaired, and at length annihilated it. Every Government under the old system of representation that continued long in office was sure to contract this stain; that of Lord Liverpool did not escape it. There were sure to

be some instances of misapplied patronage, which inevitably incurred the censure and irritated the feelings of thinking men. This unpopularity is a source of more continued weakness to a Government than would be at first sight imagined. It might be thought that an administration with plenty of votes would have plenty of courage; but it is not so. A certain timidity belongs to all oligarchies, and to an unpopular oligarchy—to an oligarchy that is believed to rest upon corruption—above all. It is timid at every outcry, and it yields whenever it can. In the plenitude of power Sir Robert Walpole did not press his excise scheme, though it was a wise one, and though he was sure that it was so; he felt that at a crisis he was weak, that the popular odium was not compensated by Parliamentary support. Make what refined devices we may, in every free Government any strong opinion that possesses the multitude will be powerful; it will not be least powerful where the Government is conscious that it rests upon a basis which is odious to common men, and which therefore shuns a popular scrutiny.

For these reasons, therefore, we think, when the subject is accurately examined, the supposed strength which the administrations of the last century are commonly said to have derived from the employment of patronage was a strength rather seeming than substantial. It added to the strength of administrations otherwise strong, and that did not need it; but it was not in its nature to strengthen those which were weak, or to aid, as it is sometimes believed to have aided, tottering administrations in a fatal division.

But even for this strength, such as it was, the people of the last century paid a very heavy price. They purchased it by the almost total sacrifice of efficiency in administration. We can hardly at the present day conceive how utterly feeble that administration formerly was; nor have we space to go into the details of the subject. But one test on the subject may be easily used; we mean the test of success. Our administrative system was subjected in the last century to three of the most searching tests of efficiency. It was tried by a prolonged riot in the capital, by a rebellion within the island, by the resistance of our greatest colonies. If any events can

bring out the latent vigour of an administration, these would probably bring it out. They did not, however, do so. We all know the utter feebleness and miserable inefficiency with which the mobs of 1780 were resisted, if resistance it can be called. We know that London was then almost as much at the mercy of its worst inhabitants as Paris has ever been. But it is not so generally known that similar events nearly as bad, though not quite as bad, had happened before; but they did happen. In Hume's *Correspondence* there is a curious description of the riots of 1765: "Another very extraordinary event is the riot which the silk-weavers have made for some days past. They got a bill passed in the House of Commons to prevent more effectually the importation of foreign silks, which the Duke of Bedford threw out in the House of Lords. The next day, above ten thousand of these people came down to the House, desiring redress, with drums beating and colours flying. They attacked the Duke of Bedford in his chariot, and threw so large a stone at him, that if he had not put out his hand, and saved his head by having his thumb cut to the bone, he must have been killed. He behaved with great resolution, and got free of them; since which time he has remained blockaded in his own house, and defended by the troops. Yesterday the same number of weavers assembled again at the House of Lords, where the horse and foot guards were to secure the entry for the peers. The mob were ranged before the soldiers, and their colours were playing in the faces of his Majesty's troops. The degree of security with which these people commit felony seems to me the most formidable circumstance in the whole: they carry in their whole deportment so much tranquillity and ease, that they do not seem apprised of the illegality of their proceedings. It is really serious to see the legislature of this country intimidated by such a rabble; and to see the House of Lords send for Justice Fielding, to hear him prove for how many reasons he ought not to do his duty. The Duke of Bedford is still in danger of his life if he goes out of his house; and we expect to see the same number of people assembled every day, till something more vigorous is done than any one has yet chosen to propose. The spirit of robbing has

gone forth in this nation to a degree that we have not experienced this century past, and it will not be found so easy a matter to quell it" (pp. 55, 56).

No description can be more graphic of the weakness of a feeble administration, unmoved by evident danger. We need not dwell on the other instances of inefficiency to which we have alluded. In 1745, the administration of the day—a divided and discordant administration, it is true—permitted a small body of half-disciplined Highlanders to advance into the centre of England. So imperfect were their arrangements, that some good judges of evidence have thought that if Charles Edward had pushed on towards London, he might have succeeded in taking it. The war with our North-American Colonies was conducted with as little wisdom and energy; it could not be with less. The whole strength of the empire was never put forth; and historians have often wondered at the series of petty expeditions and inconclusive conflicts with which so great a country as England endeavoured to reduce so great a country as America. Lord North's Government was perhaps somewhat feebler than many of the Governments of the last century; but even if so, it is only because it exhibits the characteristic defects belonging to them all in a conspicuous and aggravated form. It was not exceptionally inefficient, but characteristically inefficient.

The explanation of this inefficiency is simple. It was caused by the abuse of patronage; or rather, to speak the language of the old Tory theory, by *the use* of it to bribe members of Parliament and proprietors of boroughs. George II. is reported to have said to Sir Robert Walpole, "I won't have my army jobbed away for your members: it shan't be". It had been, however; and the state of the English army at the commencement of the long war with France is a conclusive proof of it. Burke, in his speech on economical reform, has explained this point with more humour than is usual with him:—

"There was another disaster far more doleful than this. I shall state it, as the cause of that misfortune lies at the bottom of almost all our prodigality. Lord Talbot attempted

to reform the kitchen; but such, as he well observed, is the consequence of having duty done by one person, whilst another enjoys the emoluments, that he found himself frustrated in all his designs. On that rock his whole adventure split—his whole scheme of economy was dashed to pieces; his department became more expensive than ever; the Civil List debt accumulated—why? It was truly from a cause which, though perfectly adequate to the effect, one would not have instantly guessed—it was because the *turnspit in the king's kitchen was a member of Parliament.*[1] The king's domestic servants were all undone; his tradesmen remained unpaid and became bankrupt—*because the turnspit in the king's kitchen was a member of Parliament.* His Majesty's slumbers were interrupted, his pillow was stuffed with thorns, and his peace of mind entirely broken—*because the king's turnspit was a member of Parliament.* The judges were unpaid; the justice of the kingdom bent and gave way; the foreign Ministers remained inactive and unprovided; the system of Europe was dissolved; the chain of our alliances was broken; all the wheels of Government at home and abroad were stopped—*because the king's turnspit was a member of Parliament.*" The efficiency of the public offices was sacrificed, in order that the best posts in them might be better used as Parliamentary purchase-money. It would have been a heavy price to pay, even for a Government that was really strong.

It is curious, that though under our old constitution so heavy a price was paid for Parliamentary support, and so little support was at critical moments obtained for that price, the Governments of that day did very little with the strength which they so bought, after they had bought it. We nowadays consider that the first use which a Prime Minister will make of a large majority, is to legislate with it. In the last century men did not think so. Lord John Russell justly said in the House of Commons, that there was no statute, no act of legislation, which we can connect with or can trace to Lord Chatham, who was the most celebrated Minister of England

[1] *Vide* " Lord Talbot's speech, in Almond's *Parliamentary Register*, vol. vii., p. 79, of the proceedings of the Lords ".

during the last century. There have been a greater number of important Acts of Parliament passed in the last twenty years than in the previous hundred and twenty. The people of England, a hundred years ago, and their Parliament also, were habitually satisfied with their existing institutions: they did not care to abolish any of these, or to introduce any new ones. Accordingly, when the Minister at that time had bought his majority, he had nothing to do with it except to keep himself Minister.

On the whole, therefore, we do not think that our old system of representation is entitled to the credit which it has often received for causing and maintaining strong administrations. The ingenious devices which it contained seem to us to have failed whenever they were really wanted; and we conclude, from the entire history of the last century, that Governments were then only strong when public opinion was definite and decided, and when that is so they will be strong now.

The only one of our questions as to our old system of representation that is still unanswered is, What was the degree of its suitability for training and developing statesmen? Lord Macaulay has in more than one part of his writings expressed a doubt whether all representative systems are not in this respect defective. They require, he says, that an influential statesman should be an orator, and especially a ready and debating orator; and this, he considers, is inexpedient. He appears to believe, both that the practice of debating injures the intellect, and that the conviction of its necessity makes a statesman prize and practise qualities which are not essential to his true calling in preference to those which really are so. He believes that the statesman is induced to think more of the House of Commons, and of the effect which his measures would produce there, than is desirable; and also, that the habit of defending those measures by very questionable arguments disorganises the intellect of a statesman and renders it much less fit than it would otherwise be for the investigation of important truths. There is doubtless some truth in these ideas; the practical working of a representative Government often tends to produce these hurtful effects upon the minds of the states-

men who are eminent under it. And not only so. All free Governments are to some extent unfavourable to much originality of mind in their influential statesmen. They necessitate an appeal to the people; and the mind of the people is almost by definition ordinary and commonplace. The opinions of the majority of mankind necessarily partake of these qualities; and those who have to please that majority must in all ages, to some extent, cultivate them. And these are serious disadvantages. But, on the other hand, it may be fairly believed that no system which has yet been devised secures for the most eminent statesmen in a nation so large a number of great qualities as are necessary for the Prime Minister under a well-developed system of Parliamentary government. It is true, that a man who is eminent in that position may not be in the least eminent in abstract or original reflection; it is possible that he may be beneath the average capacity of men in that respect. But, on the other hand, this defect is not peculiar to a Parliamentary system of government. No device has yet been suggested for securing the supremacy in the State to persons capable of original thought. A Prime Minister under a Parliamentary constitution must have a very great number of other great qualities. He must be a man of business long trained in great affairs; he must be, if not a great orator, a great explainer; he must be able to expound with perspicuity to a mixed assembly complicated measures and involved transactions; he must be a great party leader, and have the knowledge of men, the easy use of men, and the miscellaneous sagacity, which such eminence necessarily implies; he must be a ready man, a managing man, and an intelligible man: and under no other system of government with which we are acquainted is there any security that all these, or an equal number of other, important qualities will constantly be found in the ruler of a nation. All these qualities the system of representation which existed in England during the last century secured to the utmost. We might easily run over the names of the eminent statesmen whom it produced, but it is needless; we know that they were eminent, and we know that they were many.

A claim has often been made on behalf of the old close boroughs, that the number and the greatness of these statesmen is due to them. A very long list of the names of the statesmen who were brought into Parliament during the last century by those boroughs is set forth, and it is alleged that the excellence of these great statesmen was a conspicuous advantage which resulted from the machinery that introduced them to public life. But to this argument there will be found, when the subject is narrowly examined, to be several important qualifications.

In the first place, a great number of remarkable men undoubtedly came into Parliament under the old system of representation by means of the close boroughs, simply and solely because that was at that time the readiest and simplest mode of coming in. If any other mode had been the readiest, they would have availed themselves of that instead. Take the case of Sir Robert Walpole. Had any man that ever lived more of the qualities, the good and the bad qualities, of a great popular candidate? He was genial, sagacious, and unsensitive. He would have managed the mob, and managed the attorney, and managed the electors, better almost than any other of our remarkable statesmen; yet he came in for a close borough. Circumstances threw that mode of entering public life into his path, and he took advantage of it immediately; but if the system of representation then prevailing in England had been a different one, he would have taken advantage of that also. We must not give the close boroughs a peculiar credit for all the eminent statesmen who entered into the House of Commons by means of them, but only for such of the great statesmen as from the nature of their mind and the peculiarity of their circumstances, would most likely not have entered Parliament in any other way; and these are not many.

This is one great qualification. A still more important one remains. A great number of able men came into Parliament formerly who do not appear there now, because there was a motive to enter it at that time which does not now exist. Public life was in the last century not only a career, but a livelihood. It was possible to make a subsistence, and even

a fortune, by it. Take the case of the first Lord Liverpool: he was a man of no extraordinary genius or unequalled abilities; he was simply a man of plain, strong, ordinary understanding; he had good sense, and good habits of business: he had no qualities which a very great number of young men in every generation may not be sure that they have. Nevertheless he began life with scarcely any money, he passed a long life in the service of the State, he lived in affluence, and he provided amply for his family. The possibility of such a career could not but render public life in the highest degree attractive. Fortune as well as fame were, it was evident, to be obtained in it by sound abilities and good management. In consequence, a very great number of young men were glad to enter Parliament; and if the same incentives had been continued to the present day, when education is so much more general, and social advantages so much more diffused, it is difficult to say how much that number might not have been by this time augmented. If the places and pensions, the patent offices and the sinecures, from which the profitableness of public life was derived, were still in existence, very many of the ablest, the most cultivated, and the most interesting young men in every generation would be desirous to enter Parliament. They would throng any avenue which was open for their purpose; they would address, and perhaps not unsuccessfully, the electors of boroughs, whether small or large; they would attempt to gain a share of our county representation, exclusive as that still in some degree is. We perhaps are not likely to see again in England a time when public life will afford the means of subsistence, as well as the opportunities of ambition. We do not, on the whole, regret the change that has taken place. We do not say that it should be lamented; but it has its disadvantages. The public cannot expect to be so well served by its statesmen now that it is served gratuitously, as it was when it paid highly for their services. Instead of the number of remarkable statesmen who were introduced into the House of Commons by means of the close boroughs being so great as to excite our wonder, we may rather be surprised that it was not greater. The incentives to

a public career were then so strong, that we may wonder that more remarkable persons did not enter upon it. The close boroughs must have been almost as much an impediment as an aid, or the number of statesmen attracted in the last century to the service of the nation must have been much larger than in fact it was.

Such was in part the case. The close boroughs did not, in truth, introduce conscientious and scrupulous men to an attractive position in public life. The position of a member nominated to the representation of a close borough by its proprietor was a position of dependence. He was an *employé*. He had to vote as often as, and just as, the owner of the borough told him. If he did not do so, he might at the next election be excluded entirely from public life, or be obliged to search through the list of borough owners for a new patron. Even when the member for a close borough was permitted to exercise his own judgment, the public would scarcely believe that he was so. They attributed all which he did to the influence of the proprietor of his seat; and if there chanced to be an apparent difference of opinion, they were more disposed to attribute some sinister design to the owner of the borough than any substantial independence to the member for it. The votes of a nominated member were not regarded as his own, even when in fact they were so. As we might expect, persons of high character and sensitive nature shrank from this dependence. They could not endure that it should be said that they had no control over the course which they adopted in politics; the possibility of the supposition that they must vote according to the edict of some one else was nearly as odious as the having so to vote. A curious example of this inevitable tendency in men of high and susceptible natures may be found in the life of Sir Samuel Romilly. He avowedly preferred the purchase of a seat to a position in which he might be imagined to be dependent. He preferred to be the member for a borough which was publicly known to be commonly venal, to being the member for a borough of which a nobleman or gentleman who took a genuine interest in politics was the proprietor. He preferred its being known

that he had bought his seat, to the possibility of a suspicion that he held it upon a tenure of base service. In very many cases, which cannot now be known by us, an analogous feeling must have prevented shrinking and delicate men from occupying the seats for rotten boroughs, or from associating with the great noblemen who owned them. Aristocratic patronage is never very pleasant to men of this character; and it is unendurable to them that such patronage should be the basis of their career, and an essential pre-requisite to habitual life Exceptional instances apart, the close boroughs were rather an obstruction than an opening to persons of original minds and delicate dispositions.

Nor was it natural that the owners of boroughs should commonly desire to introduce such men. If these proprietors had views of their own, they selected men who would give effect to those views; and these would ordinarily be men of pliant characters and unsuggestive intellects. If such proprietors had no opinion, they ordinarily put the seat up to auction in the market, and got as much money as they could get for it. Nor, in the few cases in which noblemen introduced men of the highest order of minds into Parliament, and in which they treated them with tenderness and delicacy, were they by any means disposed to admit them to an equality with themselves, or with the near connections of great families. They reserved high office as much as possible for themselves, and for those who mingled by right of birth in their own society; and believed that they had done much in giving the opportunity of a public career and the profit of a minor place to able men of humbler station whom they had brought into the House of Commons. The Rockingham party, the best party that ever was composed of the associated proprietors of close boroughs, thus treated Mr. Burke, who was the greatest man who ever sat for a close borough. We cannot but be indignant at such conduct; we cannot help saying that it showed high-bred exclusiveness, and aristocratic narrowness of mind: but we also cannot help perceiving that it was natural. The same thing would be sure to happen again in any similar circumstances. The owners of seats inevitably believed that

they were theirs; that they, and that men of their family and their station, had an evident right to enjoy whatever was most desirable in the consequences of them. They believed that they had a right to their own, and to all it produced. Historians may lament that Lord John Cavendish was preferred to Mr. Burke; but if the old system of representation were once more re-established, a similar phenomenon would happen again: the near connections of the large proprietors of Parliamentary property would again be preferred by those proprietors to all others. The universal tendencies of human nature ensure that it should be so.

On the other hand, although the close boroughs did not aid men of able minds and sensitive natures in the entrance to public life, they did aid men of able minds and coarse natures. The latter were willing to be dependents, and were able to be serviceable dependents; they were inclined to be slaves, and were able to be useful slaves. The pecuniary profits derivable from a public career, the places and pensions open to and readily obtainable by an able public man, brought a large number of such men into Parliament. We need not cite many instances, for the fact is evident. The entire history of the last century is full of such men—as Mr. Rigby, as the first Lord Holland, as Budd Doddington. The suspicion of dependence, and the reality of aristocratic patronage, were easily endured by men of covetous dispositions and vulgar characters: they only desired to have as much as possible of whatever profits were obtainable, and whatsoever the path to great profits might be, that was the road for them. And independently of these extreme cases, the close boroughs tended to fill the House of Commons with men of commonplace opinions and yielding characters, who accepted the creed of their patrons very easily, and without, in all ordinary cases, any conscious suppression of their own. Their preferences were so languid, that they were not conscious of relinquishing them. The facile flexibility of decorous mediocrity is one of the most obvious facts of human nature; and it is one of the most valuable facts, for without it the requisite union of great political parties would scarcely be attainable.

Such and so great seem to us the deductions which are to be made from the common belief that the close boroughs tended to open the House of Commons to men of original minds and refined dispositions. They are so great, as to make it dubious whether that observation has even a nucleus of truth; they indisputably show that in its ordinary form it is an extreme exaggeration; and they suggest a doubt whether as much or more may not be said for the very opposite of it.

We have now, therefore, completed our long investigation. We have inquired whether our old system of Parliamentary representation did or did not give us a Parliament substantially accordant with the true public opinion of the English nation; whether it gave, to all classes who had political ideas to express, the means of expressing them; whether it had any peculiar tendency to produce great and original statesmen. What, then, are the results which we have learned from this investigation? What are the lessons which this remarkable history, when it is examined, tends to teach us?

First, we should learn from it to distrust complicated expedients for making strong administrations, and refined expedients for producing wise and able statesmen. The sole security upon which we can depend for a strong Government is a consistent union in the nation. If we have that, we shall have a strong Government under any tolerable Parliamentary system; and if we have not that, we shall not have under any a really strong Government on ordinary occasions. The true security for having a sufficient supply of good statesmen is to maintain a sufficient supply of good constituencies. We need not regret the rotten boroughs, if we have instead of them an adequate number of tolerably educated and not too numerous constituencies, in which the great majority of the voters are reasonably independent and tolerably incorrupt. There is nothing in either of these two respects very valuable in our old system of representation. It did not secure to us an unusual number of coherent and powerful administrations; it did not of itself give us an exceptionally great number of able and honest statesmen.

Secondly, we should learn from the history of the last

century that it is perfectly idle to attempt to give political power to persons who have no political capacity, who are not intellectual enough to form opinions, or who are not high-minded enough to act on those opinions. This proposition is admitted in words; everybody says it is a truism. But is it admitted in reality? Do not all the ordinary plans for a uniform extension of the suffrage practically deny it? Will not their inevitable effect be, in the smaller and poorer boroughs at least, to throw, or to attempt to throw, much power into the hands of the voters who are sure to be ignorant, and who are almost sure to be corrupt?

Lastly, the events of the earlier part of the last century show us—demonstrate, we may say, to us—the necessity of retaining a very great share of power in the hands of the wealthier and more instructed classes—of the real rulers of public opinion. We have seen that we owe the security of our present constitutional freedom to the possession by these classes of that power: we have learned that under a more democratic system the House of Stuart might have been still upon the throne; that the will of the numerical majority in the nation would probably have placed it there, and would probably have kept it there; that the close boroughs of former times gave, in an indirect form and in an objectionable manner, the requisite influence to the instructed classes; and we must infer, therefore, that we should be very cautious how we now proceed to found a new system, without any equivalent provision, and with no counterbalancing weight, to the scanty intelligence of very ordinary persons and to the unbridled passions of the multitude.

If we duly estimate the significance of these conclusions, we shall perhaps think that to have been once more reminded of them, at a critical instant, is a result of sufficient significance to justify this protracted investigation, and an adequate apology for the detail which has been necessary to render it intelligible.

MR. GLADSTONE.[1]

(1860.)

WE believe that Quarterly essayists have a peculiar mission in relation to the characters of public men. We believe it is their duty to be personal. This idea may seem ridiculous to some of our readers; but let us consider the circumstances carefully. We allow that personality abounds already, that the names of public men are for ever on our lips, that we never take up a newspaper without seeing them. But this incessant personality is wholly fragmentary; it is composed of chance criticism on special traits, of fugitive remarks on temporary measures, of casual praise and casual blame. We can expect little else from what is written in haste, or is spoken without limitation. Public men must bear this criticism as they can. Those whose names are perpetually in men's mouths must not be pained if singular things are sometimes said of them. Still *some* deliberate truth should be spoken of our statesmen, and if Quarterly essayists do not speak it, who will? We fear it will remain unspoken.

Mr. Gladstone is a problem, and it is very remarkable that he should be a problem. We have had more than ordinary means for judging of him. He has been in public life for seven and twenty years; he has filled some of the most conspicuous offices in the State; he has been a distinguished member of the Tory party; he *is* a distinguished member of the Liberal party; he has brought forward many measures; he has passed many years in independent Opposition, which

[1] *Speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Finance of the Year and the Treaty of Commerce with France.* Delivered in the House of Commons on Friday, 10th February, 1860. Corrected by the Author.

is unquestionably the place most favourable to the display of personal peculiarities in Parliament; he is the greatest orator in the House of Commons; he never allows a single important topic to pass by without telling us what he thinks of it;—and yet, with all these data, we are all of us in doubt about him. What he will do, and what he will think, still more, why he will do it, and why he will think it, are *quæstiones vexatæ* at every political conjuncture. At the very last ministerial crisis, when the Government of Lord Derby was on the verge of extinction, when every vote on Lord John's resolution[1] was of critical importance, no one knew till nearly the last hour how Mr. Gladstone would vote, and in the end he voted against his present colleagues. The House of Commons gossips are generally wrong about him. Nor is the uncertainty confined to Parliamentary divisions; it extends to his whole career. Who can calculate his future course? Who can tell whether he will be the greatest orator of a great administration; whether he will rule the House of Commons; whether he will be, as his gifts at first sight mark him out to be, our greatest statesman? or whether, below the gangway, he will utter unintelligible discourses; will aid in destroying many ministries and share in none; will pour forth during many hopeless years a bitter, a splendid, and a vituperative eloquence?

We do not profess that we can solve all the difficulties that are suggested even by the superficial consideration of a character so exceptional. We do not aspire to be prophets. Mr. Gladstone's destiny perplexes us—perhaps as much as it perplexes our readers. But we think that we can explain much of his past career; that many of his peculiarities are not so unaccountable as they seem; that a careful study will show us the origin of most of them; that we may hope to indicate some of the material circumstances and conditions on which his future course depends, though we should not be so bold as to venture to foretell it.

During the discussion on the Budget, an old Whig who did not approve of it, but who had to vote for it, muttered of

[1] On the Parliamentary Reform Bill brought forward by Lord Derby's Government in 1859.

its author, "Ah, Oxford on the surface, *but* Liverpool below". And there is truth in the observation, though not in the splenetic sense in which it was intended. Mr. Gladstone does combine, in a very curious way, many of the characteristics which we generally associate with the place of his education and many of those which we usually connect with the place of his birth. No one can question the first part of the observation. No man has through life been more markedly an Oxford man than Mr. Gladstone. His *Church and State*, published after he had been several years in public life, was instinct with the very spirit of the Oxford of that time. His *Homer*, published the other day, bears nearly equal traces of the school in which he was educated. Even in his ordinary style there is a tinge half theological, half classical, which recalls the studies of his youth. Many Oxford men much object to the opinions of their distinguished representative; but none of them would deny, that he remarkably embodies the peculiar results of the peculiar teaching of the place.

And yet he has something which his collegiate training never would have given him, which it is rather remarkable it has not taken away from him. There is much to be said in favour of the University of Oxford. No one can deny to it very great and very peculiar merits. But certainly it is not an exciting place, and its education operates as a narcotic rather than as a stimulant. Most of its students devote their lives to a single profession, and we may observe among them a kind of sacred torpidity. In many rural parsonages there are men of very great cultivation, who are sedulous in their routine duties, who attend minutely to the ecclesiastical state of the souls in their village, but who are perfectly devoid of general intellectual interests. They have no anxiety to solve great problems; to busy themselves with the speculations of their age; to impress their peculiar theology—for peculiar it is both in its expression and in its substance—on the educated mind of their time. Oxford, it has been said, "disheartens a man early". At any rate, since Newmanism lost Father Newman, few indeed of her acknowledged sons attain decided eminence in our deeper controversies. Jowett

she would repudiate, and Mansel is but applying the weapons of scepticism to the service of credulity. The most characteristic of Oxford men labour quietly, delicately, and let us hope usefully, in a confined sphere; they hope for nothing more, and wish for nothing more. Even in secular literature we may observe an analogous tone. The *Saturday Review* is remarkable as an attempt on the part of "university men" to speak on the political topics and social difficulties of the time. And what do they teach us? It is something like this: "So-and-so has written a tolerable book, and we would call attention to the industry which produces tolerable books. So-and-so has devoted himself to a great subject, and we would observe that the interest now taken in great subjects is very commendable. Such-and-such a lady has delicate feelings, which are desirable in a lady, though we know that they are contrary to the facts of the world. All common persons are doing as well as they can, but it does not come to much after all. All statesmen are doing as ill as they can, and let us be thankful that *that* does not come to much either." We may search and search in vain through this repository of the results of "university teaching" for a single truth which it has established, for a single high cause which it has advanced, for a single deep thought which is to sink into the minds of its readers. We have, indeed, a nearly perfect embodiment of the corrective scepticism of a sleepy intellect. "A B says he has done something, but he has not done it; C D has made a parade of demonstrating this or that proposition, but he does not prove his case; there is one mistake in page 5, and another in page 113; a great history has been written of this or that century, but the best authorities as to that period have not been consulted, which, however, is not very remarkable, as there is nothing in them." We could easily find, if it were needful, many traces of the same indifferent habit, the same apathetic culture, in the more avowed productions of Oxford men. The shrewd eye of Mr. Emerson, stimulated doubtless by the contrast to America, quickly caught the trait. "After all," says the languid Oxford gentleman of his story, "there is nothing true and nothing new, and no matter!"

To this, as to every other species of indifferentism, Mr. Gladstone is the antithesis. Oxford has not disheartened *him*. Some of his colleagues would say they wished it had. He is interested in everything he has to do with, and often interested too much. He proposes to put a stamp on contract notes with an eager earnestness as if the destiny of Europe, here and hereafter, depended upon its enactment. He cannot let anything alone. "Sir," said an old distributor of stamps in Westmoreland, "my head, sir, is worn out. I must resign. The Chancellor, sir, is imposing of things that I can't understand." The world is not well able to understand them either. The public departments break down under the pressure of the industry of their superior. Mr. Gladstone is ready to work as long as his brain will hold together—to make speeches as long as he has utterance (words he is sure to have); but the subordinate officials will not work equally hard. They have none of the excitement of origination; they will not share the credit of success. They do, however, share the discredit of failure. In the high-pressure season of this year's Budget, Acts of Parliament have been passed in which essential provisions were not to be found, in which what was intended to be enacted was omitted or exceeded, in which the marginal notes were widely astray of the text. In his literary works Mr. Gladstone is the same. His book on Homer is perhaps the most zealous work which this generation has produced. He has the enthusiasm of a German professor for the scholastic detail, for the exact meaning of word No. 1, for the precise number of times which word No. 2 is used by the poet; he has the enthusiasm of a lover for Helen, the enthusiasm of an orator for the speeches. Of his theological books we need not speak; every reader will recall the curious succession of needless *quæstiunculæ* by which their interest is marred.

Some of this energy Mr. Gladstone probably owes to the place of his birth. Lancashire is sometimes called "America-and-water": we suspect it is America and very little water. The excessive energy natural to half-educated men who have but a single pursuit cannot, indeed, in any part of England,

produce the monstrous results which it occasionally produces in the United States; it is kept in check by public opinion, by the close vicinity of an educated world. But in its own pursuit, in commerce, we question whether New York itself is more intensely eager than Liverpool—at any rate, it is difficult to conceive how it can be. Like several other remarkable men whose families belong to the place, Mr. Gladstone has carried into other pursuits, the eagerness, the industry—we are loth to say the rashness, but the boldness—which Liverpool men apply to the business of Liverpool. Underneath the scholastic polish of his Oxford education, he has the speculative hardihood, the eager industry of a Lancashire merchant.

Such is one of the principal peculiarities which Mr. Gladstone's character presents even to a superficial observer. But something more than superficial observation is necessary really to understand a character so complicated and so odd. We will touch upon some of the traits which are among the most important; and if our minute analysis has, or seems to have, some of the painfulness of a vivisection, we would observe that a defect of this kind is in some degree inseparable from the task we have undertaken. We cannot explain the special peculiarities of a singular man of genius without a somewhat elaborate and a half-metaphysical discussion.

It is needless to say that Mr. Gladstone is a great orator. Oratory is one of the pursuits as to which there is no error. The criterion is ready. Did the audience feel? were they excited? did they cheer? These questions, and others such as these, can be answered without a mistake. A man who can move the House of Commons—still, after many changes, the most severe audience in the world—must be a great orator. The most sincere admirers and the most eager depreciators of Mr. Gladstone are agreed on this point, and it is almost the only point on which they are agreed.

It will be well, however, to pause upon this characteristic of Mr. Gladstone's genius, and to examine the nature of it rather anxiously, because it seems to afford the true key to some of his most perplexing peculiarities. Mr. Gladstone has, beyond every other man in this generation, what we

may call the oratorical *impulse*. We are in the habit of speaking of rhetoric as an art, and also of oratory as a faculty, and in both cases we speak quite truly. No man can speak without a special intellectual gift, and no man can speak well without a special intellectual training. But neither this gift of the intellect nor this education will suffice of themselves. A man must not only know what to say, he must have a vehement longing to get up and say it. Many persons, rather sceptical persons especially, do not feel this in the least. They see before them an audience—a miscellaneous collection of odd-looking men—but they feel no wish to convince them of anything. "Are not they very well as they are? They believe what they have been brought up to believe." "Confirm every man in *his own* manner of conceiving," said one great sage. "A savage among savages is very well," remarked another. You may easily take away one creed and then not be able to implant another. "You may succeed in unfitting men for their own purposes without fitting them for your purposes"—thus thinks the *cui bono* sceptic. Another kind of sceptic is distrustful, and speaks thus: "I know *I can't* convince these people; if I could, perhaps I would, but I can't. Only look at them! they have all kinds of crotchets in their heads. There is a wooden-faced man in spectacles. How can you convince a wooden-faced man in spectacles? And see that other man with a narrow forehead and compressed lips—is it any use talking to him? It is of no use; do not hope that mere arguments will impair the prepossessions of nature and the steady convictions of years." Mr. Gladstone would not feel these sceptical arguments. He would get up to speak. He has the *didactic* impulse. He has the "courage of his ideas". He will convince the audience. He knows an argument which will be effective, he has one for one and another for another; he has an enthusiasm which he feels will rouse the apathetic, a demonstration which he thinks must convert the incredulous, an illustration which he hopes will drive his meaning even into the heads of the stolid. At any rate, he will try. He has *a nature*, as Coleridge might have said, towards his audience. He is sure, if they only knew

what he knows, they would feel as he feels, and believe as he believes. And by this he conquers. This living faith, this enthusiasm, this confidence, call it as we will, is an extreme power in human affairs. One *croyant*, said the Frenchman, is a greater power than fifty *incrédules*. In the composition of an orator, the hope, the credulous hope, that he will convince his audience, is the *primum mobile*, it is the primitive incentive which is the spring of his influence and the source of his power. Mr. Gladstone has this incentive in perhaps an excessive and dangerous measure. Whatever may be right or wrong in pure finance, in abstract political economy, it is certain that no one save Mr. Gladstone would have come down with the Budget of 1860 to the Commons of 1860. No other man would have believed that such a proposal would have a chance. Yet after the warning—the disheartening warning of a reluctant Cabinet—Mr. Gladstone came down from a depressing sick-bed, with semi-bronchitis hovering about him, entirely prevailed for the moment, and three parts conquered after all. We will not say that *the world* is given to men of this temperament and this energy; on the contrary, there is often a turn in the tide, the ovation of the spring may be the prelude to unpopularity in the autumn; but we see that *audiences* are given them; we see that unimpressible men are deeply moved by them—that the driest topics of legislation and finance are for the instant affected by them—that the prolonged effects of that momentary influence may be felt for many years, sometimes for centuries. The orator has a dominion over the critical instant, and the consequences of the decisions taken during that instant may last long after the orator and the audience have both passed away.

Nor is the didactic impulse the only one which is essential to a great political orator; nor is it the only one which Mr. Gladstone has. We say it with respect; but he has the *contentious* impulse. He illustrates the distinction between the pacific and the peaceful. On all great questions, on the controversies of states and empires, Mr. Gladstone is the most pacific of mankind. He hates the very rumour of war; he trusts in moral influences; he detests the bare idea of military

preparations. He will not believe that preparations are necessary till the enemy is palpable. In the early part of 1853 he did not believe that the Russian war was impending; after the conversations of the Emperor Nicholas with Sir Hamilton Seymour, he proposed to Parliament a scheme for converting some portions of the National Debt, which could only be successful if peace continued, and which, after the outbreak of the war, failed ignominiously. In 1860, *mutatis mutandis*, he has done the same. He staked his financial reputation upon a fine calculation; he gave us a Budget in which the two ends scarcely met. The Chinese war came, and they no longer meet. We believe that Mr. Gladstone so much hates the bare idea of the possibility of war, that after many warnings, after at least one failure which must have been painful, and which should have been instructive, he has refused to take even the contingency of hostilities into his calculations. Some one said he was not only a Christian, but a morbid Christian. He cannot imagine that anything so coarse as war will occur; when it does occur, he has a tendency to disapprove of it as soon as he can. During the Russian war he soon joined, in fact if not in name, the peace-at-all-price party; he exerted his finest reasonings and his most persuasive eloquence against a war which was commenced with his consent. At the present moment no Englishman, not Mr. Bright himself, *feels* so little the impulse to arm. He will not believe in a war till he sees men fighting. He is the most pacific of our statesmen in theory and in policy. When you hear Mr. Gladstone, he is about the most combative. He can bear a good deal about the politics of Europe; but let a man question the fees on vatting, or the change in the game certificate, or the stamp on bills of lading—what melodious thunders of loquacious wrath! The world, he hints, is likely to end at such observations, and it is dreadful that they should be made by the honourable member who made them—"by the honourable member who four years ago said so-and-so, and five years before that moved," etc. etc. The number of well-intentioned and tedious persons whom Mr. Gladstone annually scolds into a latent dislike of him must be considerable.

But though we may smile at the *minutiæ* in which this contentious impulse sometimes shows itself, we must remember that the impulse itself is essential to a great political orator, everywhere in some degree, but in England especially. To be an influential speaker in the House of Commons, a man must be a great debater. He must excel not only in elaborate set speeches, but likewise in quick occasional repartee. No one but a rather contentious person will ever so excel. Mr. Fox, the most genial of men, was asked why he disputed so vehemently about some trifle or other. He said, "I *must* do so; I can't live without discussion". And this is the temperament of a great debater. It must be a positive pain to him to be silent under questionable assertions, to hear others saying that which he cannot agree with. An indifferent sceptic such as we formerly spoke of, endures this very easily. "He thinks, no doubt, that what the speaker is saying is quite wrong; but people do not understand what he is saying; very likely they won't understand the answer: besides, we've a majority; what is the use of arguing when you have a majority? Let us outvote him on the spot, and go to bed." And so, report says, have whips argued to Mr. Gladstone, but he is ever ready. He takes up the parable of disputation at a quarter past twelve, and goes on till he has exhausted argument, illustration, ingenuity, and research. To hardly any man have both the impulses of the political orator been given in so great a measure: the didactic orator is usually felicitous in exposition only; the great debater is, like Fox, only great when stung to reply by the *æstrus* of contention. But Mr. Gladstone is by nature, by vehement overruling nature, great in both arts; he longs to pour forth his own belief; he cannot rest till he has contradicted every one else.

In addition to this oratorical temperament, Mr. Gladstone has in a high degree the most important intellectual talent of an orator; he has what we may call an adaptive mind. He has described this himself better than most people would describe it:—

"Poets of modern times have composed great works in ages that stopped their ears against them. *Paradise Lost* does not represent the time of

Charles the Second, nor the *Excursion* the first decades of the present century. The case of the orator is entirely different. His work, from its very inception, is inextricably mixed up with practice. It is cast in the mould offered to him by the mind of his hearers. It is an influence principally received from his audience (so to speak) in vapour, which he pours back upon them in a flood. The sympathy and concurrence of his time, is, with his own mind, joint parent of his work. He cannot follow nor frame ideals: his choice is, to be what his age will have him, what it requires in order to be moved by him, or else not to be at all. And as when we find the speeches in *Homer*, we know that there must have been men who could speak them, so, from the existence of units who could speak them, we know that there must have been crowds who could feel them." [1]

We may judge of the House of Commons in the same way from the great Budget speech. No one, indeed, half guides, half follows the moods of his audience more quickly, more easily, than Mr. Gladstone. There is a little playfulness in his manner, which contrasts with the dryness of his favourite topics, and the intense gravity of his earnest character. He has the same sort of control over the minds of those he is addressing that a good driver has over the animals he guides: he feels the minds of his hearers as the driver the mouths of his horses.

The species of intellect that is required for this task is pre-eminently the advocate's intellect. The instrument of oratory, at least of this kind of oratory, is the *argumentum ad hominem*. It is inextricably mixed up with practice. It argues from the data furnished to him "by the mind of his hearers". He receives his premises from them "like a vapour," and pours out his "conclusions upon them like a flood". Such an orator may believe his conclusions, but he can rarely believe them for the reasons which he assigns for them. He may be an enthusiast in his creed, he may be a zealot in his faith, but not the less will he be an advocate in his practice; not the less will he catch at disputable premises because his audience accepts them; not the less will he draw inferences from them which suit his momentary purpose; not the less will he accept the most startling varieties of assertion, for he will imbibe from one audience a different "vapour" of premises from that which he will receive from another; not the less will he have the

[1] *Homer*, vol. iii., p. 107.

chameleon-like character which we associate with a consummate advocate; not the less will he be one thing to-day, with the colour of one audience upon him; not the less will he be another to-morrow, when he has to address, persuade, and influence some different set of persons.

We scarcely think, with Mr. Gladstone, that this style of oratory is the very highest, though it is very natural that he should think so, for it exactly expresses the oratory in which he is the greatest living master. Mr. Gladstone's conception of oratory, in theory and in practice, is the oratory of Pitt, not the oratory of Chatham or of Burke: it is the oratory of adaptation. We do not deny that this is the kind of oratory which is most generally useful, the only kind which is commonly permissible, the only one which in general would not be a *bore;* but we must remember that there is an eloquence of great principles which the hearers scarcely heed, and do not accept—such as, in its highest parts, is the eloquence of Burke—we must remember that there is an eloquence of great passions, of high-wrought intense feeling, which is nearly independent of the peculiarities of its audience, because it appeals to our elemental human nature—which is the same, or much the same, in almost every audience, which is everywhere and always susceptible to the union of vivid genius and eager passion. Such as this last was, if we may trust tradition, the eloquence of Chatham, the source of his rare, magical, and occasional power. Mr. Gladstone has neither of these. Few speakers equally great have left so few passages which can be quoted—so few which embody great principles in such a manner as to be referred to by coming generations. He has scarcely given us a sentence that lives in the memory; nor is his declamation, facile and effective as it always is, the very highest declamation: it is a nearly perfect expression of intellectualised sentiment, but it wants the volcanic power of primitive passion.

The prominence of advocacy in Mr. Gladstone's mind is in appearance, though not in reality, diminished by the purity and intensity of his zeal. There is an elastic heroism about him. When he begins to speak, we may know that we are going to hear what we shall not agree with. We may believe that the

measures he proposes are mischievous; we may smile at the emphasis with which some of their *minutiæ* are insisted upon; but we inevitably feel that we have left the ordinary earth. We know that high sentiments will be appealed to by one who feels high sentiments; that strong arguments will be strongly stated by one who believes that argument should decide controversy. We know that we are beyond the realm of the Patronage Secretary; we have left behind us the doctrine that corruption is the ruling power in popular assemblies, that patronage is the purchase-money of power. We are not alleging that in the real world in which we live there is not some truth—more or less of truth—in these lower maxims; but they do not rule in Mr. Gladstone's world. He was not born to be a Secretary of the Treasury. If he tried his hand at it, he would perplex the borough attorneys out of their lives. And he *could* not keep the office a month; he would evince a real disgust at detestable requests, and guide with odd impulsiveness the delicate and latent machinery. His natural element is a higher one. He has—and it is one of the springs of great power—a real faith in the higher parts of human nature; he believes, with all his heart and soul and strength, that there *is* such a thing as truth; he has the soul of a martyr with the intellect of an advocate.

Another of Mr. Gladstone's characteristics is an extraordinary love of labour. We have alluded several times to his taste, we might almost say his whimsical taste, for *minutiæ*. He is ready with whatever detail may be necessary on any subject, no matter of what kind. He covers his greatest schemes with a crowd of irrelevant appendages, till it is difficult to see their outline. The Budget of 1860 was large enough and complicated enough, one would have thought, in its essential irremovable features; but its author did not think so. He had supplementary provisions respecting game certificates, respecting the transmission of newspapers by the post, respecting "several other minuter changes with which he was almost ashamed to trouble the committee". The labour necessary to all these accessories must have been enormous. Many of the alterations may have—must have—been lying ready in his memory, or in some old note-book, for many

years. But the industry to furbish them up, to get them into a practicable, or even into a proposable shape, would frighten not only most persons, but most laborious persons. And Mr. Gladstone's energy seems to be strictly intellectual. Nothing in his outward appearance indicates the iron physique that often carries inferior men through heavy tasks. Whatever he does that is peculiar, he does by the peculiarity of his mind. He is carried through his work, or seems to be so, by pure will, zeal, and effort.

The last characteristic of Mr. Gladstone which is very remarkable, or which we shall mention, is his scholastic intellect. We have not much of this in conspicuous men in the present day, but in former times there was a good deal of it. Lord Bacon had something like it in his eye when he spoke of minds which were not "discursive" or skilful in discovering analogies, but were *discriminative* or skilful in detecting differences. The best scene for training this sort of intellect is the law-court. Lord Bacon must have seen much of it in the work of Gray's Inn when he was young, and traces of the discipline which he then underwent may perhaps be found even in books which were written by him many years afterwards. When, as in positive law, the first principles are fixed, there is no room for the highest originality; the only admissible controversy is whether a particular case comes or does not come within a particular principle. On this point there is room for endless distinctions and eternal hair-splitting. When the principles settled by authority are not entirely consistent, the function of this kind of distinguishing reason is even greater; it has to suggest nice refinements, which may reconcile the apparent differences between the principles themselves, as well as to settle the exact relation of the case, or the facts, to the doctrine of the authorities. Accordingly, the scholastic theologians of mediæval times were the most expert masters of the discriminative ratiocination which the world has ever seen. They had to reconcile the recognised authorities of the Catholic Church—authorities vast in size, and scattered over centuries in time—with one another, with good sense, with the facts of special cases, with

the general exigencies of the age. By their labour was formed that acute logic, that subtle, if unreal philosophy which fell at the Reformation, when the authorities of the Catholic Church were no longer conclusive, and the art of arranging them was no longer important. We have learned to smile at the scholastic distinctions of former times; the inductive philosophy, which is now our most conspicuous pursuit, does not need them; the popular character of our ordinary discussion does not admit of them. In a free country we must use the sort of argument which plain men understand—and plain men certainly do not appreciate or apprehend scholastic refinements. So at least we should say beforehand. Yet Mr. Gladstone is the statesman whose expositions have, for good or for evil, more power than those of any other; his voice is a greater power in the country of plain men than any other man's; nevertheless, his intellect is of a thoroughly scholastic kind. He can distinguish between any two propositions; he never allowed, he could not allow, that any two were identical. If anyone on either side of the House is bold enough to infer anything from anything, Mr. Gladstone is ready to deny that the inference is correct—to suggest a distinction which he says is singularly important—to illustrate an apt subtlety which, in appearance at least, impairs the validity of the deduction. No schoolman could be readier at such work. We may find the same tendency of mind even more strikingly illustrated in his writings. At the time of the Gorham case, for example, he wrote a pamphlet on the Royal Supremacy. For the purposes of that case, it was of the last importance to determine the exact position of the Crown with respect to ecclesiastical affairs, and especially to the offence of heresy. The law at first seems distinct enough on the matter. The 1st of Elizabeth provides "that such jurisdictions, privileges, superiorities, and pre-eminences, spiritual and ecclesiastical, as by any spiritual or ecclesiastical power or authority hath heretofore been or may lawfully be exercised or used for the visitation of the ecclesiastical state and persons, and for reformation, order and correction of the same, and of all manner of errors, heresies, schisms,

abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities, shall for ever, by authority of this present Parliament, be united and annexed to the imperial Crown of this realm". These words would have seemed distinct and clear to most persons. They would have seemed to give to the Crown all the power it could wish to exercise—all that any spiritual authority had ever "theretofore exercised"—all that any temporal authority could ever use. We should think it was clear that Queen Elizabeth would have applied a rather summary method of instruction to any one who attempted to limit the jurisdiction conferred by this enactment. If Mr. Gladstone had lived in the times about which he was writing, he might have had to make a choice between being silent and being punished; but in the times of Queen Victoria he is not subjected to an alternative so painful. He writes securely:—

"We have now before us the terms of the great statute which, from the time it was passed, has been the actual basis of the royal authority in matters ecclesiastical; and I do not load these pages by reference to declarations of the Crown, and other public documents less in authority than this, in order that we may fix our view the more closely upon the expressions of what may fairly be termed a fundamental law in relation to the subject-matter before us.

"The first observation I make is this: there is no evidence in the words which have been quoted that the Sovereign is, according to the intention of the statute, the source or fountain-head of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They have no trace of such a meaning, in so far as it exceeds (and it does exceed) the proposition, that this jurisdiction has been by law united or annexed to the Crown.

"I do not now ask what have been the glosses of lawyers—what are the reproaches of polemical writers—or even what attributes may be ascribed to prerogative, independent of statute, and therefore applicable to the Church before as well as after the Reformation. I must for the purposes of this argument assume what I shall never cease to believe until the contrary conclusion is demonstrated by fact, namely, that, in the case of the Church, justice is to be administered from the English bench upon the same principles as in all other cases—that our judges, or our judicial committees, are not to be our legislators—and that the statutes of the realm, as they are above the sacred majesty of the Queen, so are likewise above their ministerial interpreters. It was by statute that the changes in the position of the Church at that great epoch were measured—by statute that the position itself is defined; and the statute, I say, contains no trace of such a meaning as that the Crown either originally

was the source and spring of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, or was to become such in virtue of the annexation to it of the powers recited; but simply bears the meaning, that it was to be master over its administration."

So that which seems a despotism is gradually pruned down into a vicegerency. "All the superiorities and pre-eminences spiritual and ecclesiastical," which had ever been lawfully exercised, are restricted to the single function of regulation; and by a judicious elaboration the Crown becomes scarcely the head of the Church, but only the *visitor* and corrector of it, as of several other corporations. We are not now concerned with the royal supremacy—we have no wish to hint or intimate an opinion on a vast legal discussion; but we *are* concerned with Mr. Gladstone. And we venture to say that a subtler gloss, more scholastically expressed, never fell from lawyer in the present age, or from schoolmen in times of old.

The great faculties we have mentioned give Mr. Gladstone, it is needless to say, an extraordinary influence in English politics. England is a country governed mainly by labour and by speech. Mr. Gladstone will work and can speak, and the result is what we see. With a flowing eloquence and a lofty heroism; with an acute intellect and endless knowledge; with courage to conceive large schemes, and a voice which will persuade men to adopt those schemes—it is not singular that Mr. Gladstone is of himself a power in Parliamentary life. He can do there what no one else living can do.

But the effect of these peculiar faculties is by no means unmixedly favourable. In almost every one of them some faulty tendency is latent, which may produce bad effects—in Mr. Gladstone's case has often done so, perhaps does so still. His greatest characteristic, as we have indicated, is the singular vivacity of his oratorical impulse. But great as is the immediate power which a vehement oratorical propensity, when accompanied by the requisite faculties, secures to the possessor, the advantage of possessing it, or rather of being subject to it, is by no means without an alloy. We have all heard that Paley said he knew nothing against some one *but* that he was a popular preacher. And Paley knew

what he was saying. The oratorical impulse is a *disorganising* impulse. The higher faculties of the mind require a certain calm, and the excitement of oratory is unfavourable to that calm. We know that this is so with the hearers of oratory; we know that they are carried away from their fixed principles, from their habitual tendencies, by a casual and unexpected stimulus. We speak commonly of the power of the orator. But the orator is subject himself to much the same calamity. The force which carries away his hearers must first carry away himself. He will not persuade any of his hearers unless he has first succeeded, for the moment at least, in persuading his own mind. Every exciting speech is conceived, planned, and spoken with excitement. The orator feels in his own nerves, even in a greater degree, that electric thrill which he is to communicate to his hearers. The telling ideas take hold of him with a sort of *seisure*. They fasten close upon his brain. He has a sort of passionate impulse to tell them. He hungers, as a Greek would have said, till they are uttered. His mind is full of them. He has the vision of the audience in his mind. Until he has persuaded these men of these things, life is tame, and its other stimulants are uninteresting. So much excitement is evidently unfavourable to calm reflection and deliberation. Mr. Pitt is said to have thought more of the manner in which his measures would strike the House than of the manner in which, when carried, they would work. Of course he did—every great orator will do so, unless he has a supernatural self-control. An ordinary man sits down—say to make a Budget: he arranges the accounts; adds up the figures; contrasts the effects of different taxes; works out steadily hour after hour their probable incidence, first of one, then of another. Nothing disturbs him. With the orator it is different. During that whole process he is disturbed by the vision of his hearers. How they will feel, how they will think, how they will like his proposals—cannot but occur to him. He hears his ideas rebounding in the cheers of his hearers; he is disheartened, at fancying that they will fall tamely on an inanimate and listless multitude. He is subject to two temptations; he is turned aside from the conceptions

natural to the subject by an imagination of his audience; his own eager temperament naturally inclines him to the views which will excite that audience most effectually. The tranquil deposit of ordinary ideas is interrupted by the sudden eruption of volcanic forces. We know that the popular instinct suspects the judgment of great orators; we know that it does not give them credit for patient equanimity; and the popular instinct is right.

Nor is cool reflection the only higher state of mind which the oratorical impulse interferes with; we believe that it is singularly unfavourable also to the exercise of the higher kind of imagination. Several great poets have written good dramatic harangues; but no great practical orator has ever written a great poem. The creative imagination requires a singular calm: it is "the still unravished bride of quietness," as the poets say, "the foster-child of silence and slow time".[1] No great work has ever been produced except after a long interval of still and musing meditation. The oratorical impulse interferes with this. It breaks the exclusive brooding of the mind upon the topic; it brings in a new set of ideas, the faces of the audience and the passions of listening men; it *jerks* the mind, if the expression may be allowed, just when the delicate poetry of the mind is crystallising into symmetry. The process is stayed, and the result is marred.

Mr. Gladstone has suffered from both these bad effects of the oratorical temperament. His writings, even on imaginative subjects, even on the poetry of Homer, are singularly devoid of the highest imagination. They abound in acute remarks; they excel in industry of detail; they contain many animated and some eloquent passages. But there is no central conception running through them; there is no binding idea in them; there is nothing to fuse them together; they are elaborate aggregates of varied elements; they are not shaped and consolidated wholes. Nor, it is remarkable, has his style the delicate graces which mark the productions of the gentle and meditative mind; there is something hard in its texture, something dislocated in its connections. In his writings,

[1] Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

where he is removed from the guiding check of the listening audience, he starts off, just where you least expect it. He hurries from the main subject to make a passing and petty remark. As he has not the central idea of his work vividly before him, he overlays it with tedious, accessory, and sometimes irrelevant detail.

His intellect has suffered also. He is undeniably defective in the tenacity of first principle. Probably there is nothing which he would less like to have said of him, and yet it is certainly true. We speak, of course, of intellectual consistency, not of moral probity. And he has not an *adhesive* mind; such adhesiveness as he has is rather to projects than principles. We will give—it is all we have space to give—a single remarkable instance of his peculiar mutability. He has adhered in the year 1860 to his project of reducing the amount levied in England by indirect taxation. He announced in 1853 that he would do so, and, what was singular enough, he was able to do it when the time came. But this superficial consistency must not disguise from us the entire inconsistency in abstract principle between the Budget of 1853 and the Budget of 1860. The most important element in English finance at present is the income-tax. In 1853 that tax was, Mr. Gladstone explained to us, an occasional, an exceptional, a sacred reserve. It had done much that was wonderful for our fathers in the French war; Sir R. Peel had used it with magical efficiency in our own time; but it was to be kept for first-rate objects. In 1860 the income-tax has become the tax of *all work*. Whatever is to be done, whatever other tax is to be relinquished, it is but a penny more or a penny less of this ever-ready and omnipotent impost. We do not blame Mr. Gladstone for changing his opinion. We believe that an income-tax of moderate amount should be a permanent element in our financial system. We think that additions to it from time to time are the best ways of meeting any sudden demand for exceptional expenditure. But we cannot be unaware of the transition which he has made. His opinion as to our most remarkable tax has varied, not only in detail but in essence. It was to be a rare and residuary agency; it is now a permanent

and principal force. The inconsistency goes further. He used to think that he would be guilty of a "high political offence" if he altered the present mode of assessing the income-tax, if he equalised the pressure on industrial and permanent incomes. But he is now ready to *consider* any plan with that object—in other words, he is ready to do it if he can. A great change in his fundamental estimate of our greatest tax has made an evident and indisputable change in his mode of viewing proposed reforms and alterations in it.

Mr. Gladstone's inclination—his unconscious inclination for the art of advocacy—increases his tendency to suffer from the characteristic temptations of his oratorical temperament. It is scarcely necessary to say that professional advocacy is unfavourable to the philosophical investigation of truth; a more battered commonplace cannot be found anywhere. To catch at whatever turns up in favour of your own case; to be obviously blind to everything which tells in favour of the case of your adversary; to imply doubts as to principles which it is not expedient to deny; to suggest with delicate indirectness the conclusive arguments in favour of principles which it is not wise directly to affirm—these, and such as these, are the arts of the advocate. A political orator has them almost of necessity, and Mr. Gladstone is not exempt from them. Indeed, without any fault of his own, he has them, if not to an unusual extent, at least with a very unusual conspicuousness. His vehement temperament, his "intense and glowing mind,"[1] drive him into strong statements, into absolute and unlimited assertions. He lays down a principle of tremendous breadth to establish a detail of exceeding minuteness. He is not a "hedging" advocate. He does not understand the art which Hume and Peel—different as were their respective spheres—practised with almost equal effect in those spheres. Mr. Gladstone dashes forth to meet his opponents. He will believe easily—he will state strongly whatever may confute them. An incessant use of ingenious and unqualified principles is one of Mr. Gladstone's most prominent qualities; it is unfavourable to exact consistency

[1] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*.

of explicit assertion, and to latent consistency of personal belief. His scholastic intellect makes matters worse. He will show that any two principles are or may be consistent; that if there is an apparent discrepancy, they may still, after the manner of Oxford, "be held together". One of the most remarkable of Father Newman's Oxford Sermons explains how science teaches that the earth goes round the sun, and how Scripture teaches that the sun goes round the earth; and it ends by advising the discreet believer to accept *both*. Both, it is suggested, may be accommodations to our limited intellect —aspects of some higher and less discordant unity. We have often smiled at the recollection of the old Oxford training in watching Mr. Gladstone's ingenious "reconcilements". It must be pleasant to have an argumentative acuteness which is quite sure to extricate you, at least in appearance, from any intellectual scrape. But it is a dangerous weapon to use, and particularly dangerous to a very conscientious man. He will not use it unless he believes in its results; but he will try to believe in its results, in order that he may use it. We need not spend further words in proving that a kind of advocacy at once acute, refined, and vehement, is unfavourable both to consistency of statement and to tenacious sluggishness of belief.

In this manner, the disorganising effects of his greatest peculiarities have played a principal part in shaping Mr. Gladstone's character and course. They have helped to make him annoy the old Whigs, confound the country gentlemen, and puzzle the nation generally. They have contributed to bring on him the long array of depreciating adjectives, "extravagant," "inconsistent," "incoherent," and "incalculable".

Mr. Gladstone's intellectual history has aggravated the unfavourable influence of his characteristic tendencies. Such a mind as his required, beyond any man's, the early inculcation of a steadying creed. It required that the youth, if not the child, should be father to the man: it required that a set of fixed and firm principles should be implanted in his mind in its first intellectual years—that those principles should be precise enough for its guidance, tangible enough to be commonly intelligible, true enough to stand the wear and tear of

ordinary life. The tranquil task of developing coherent principle might have calmed the vehemence of Mr. Gladstone's intellectual impulses—might have steadied the impulsive discursiveness of his nature. A settled and plain creed, which was in union with the belief of ordinary men, might have kept Mr. Gladstone in the common path of plain men—might have made him intelligible and safe. But he has had no such good fortune. He began the world with a vast religious theory; he embodied it in a book on Church and State; he defended it, as was said, mistily—at any rate, he defended it in a manner which requires much careful pains to appreciate, and much preliminary information to understand; he puzzled the ordinary mass of English Churchmen; he has been half out of sympathy with them ever since. The creed which he has chosen, or which his Oxford training stamped upon him, was one not likely to be popular with common Englishmen. It had a scholastic appearance and a mystical essence which they dislike almost equally. But this was not its worst defect. It was a theory which broke down when it was tried. It was a theory with definite practical consequences, which no one in these days will accept—which no one in these days will propose. It was a theory to be shattered by the slightest touch of real life, for it had a definite teaching which was inconsistent with the facts of that life—which all persons who were engaged in it were, on some ground or other, unanimous in rejecting. In Mr. Gladstone's case it had been shattered. He maintained, that a visible Church existed upon earth; that every State was bound to be directed by that Church; that all members of that State should, if possible, be members of that Church; that at any rate none of the members should be utterly out of sympathy with her; that the State ought to aid her in her characteristic work, and refrain from aiding her antagonists in that work; that within her own sphere the Church, though thus aided, is substantially independent; that she has an absolute right to elect her own bishops, to determine her own creed, to make her own definitions of orthodoxy and heresy. This is the high Oxford creed, and, in all essential points, it was Mr. Gladstone's first creed.

But a curious series of instructive events proved that England at least would not adopt it,—that the actual Church of England is not the Church of which it speaks,—that the actual English State is by no means the State of which it speaks. The additional endowment of the Maynooth College which Sir Robert Peel proposed was an express relinquishment of the principle that the Church of England had an exclusive right to assistance from the State; it proved that the Conservative party — the special repository of constitutional traditions—was ready to aid a different and antagonistic communion. The removal of the Jewish disabilities struck a still deeper blow: it proved that persons who could not be said to participate in even the rudiments of Anglican doctrine might be Prime Ministers and rulers in England. The theory of the exclusive union of a visible Church with a visible State vanished into the air. The real world would not endure it. We fear it must be said that the theory of the substantial independence of the English Church has vanished too. The case of Dr. Hampden proved conclusively that the intervention of the English Church in the election of her bishops was an ineffectual ceremony; that it could not be galvanised into effective life; that it was one of those lingering relics of the past which the steady English people are so loth to disturb. Undisputed practice shows that the Prime Minister, who is clearly secular prince, is the dispenser of ecclesiastical dignities. And the judgment of her Majesty's Council in the Gorham case went further yet. It touched on the finest and tenderest point of all. It decided that, on the critical question, heresy or no heresy, the final appeal was not to an ecclesiastical court, but to a lay court—to a court, not of saintly theologians, but of tough old lawyers, to men of the world most worldly. The Oxford dream of an independent Church, the Oxford dream of an exclusive Church, are both in practice forgotten; their very terms are strange in our ears; they have no reference to real life. Mr. Gladstone has had to admit this. He has voted for the endowment of Maynooth; he has voted for the admission of Jews to the House of Commons; he has acquiesced in the Hampden case; he sees daily the highest

patronage of the Church distributed by Lord Palmerston, the very man who, on any high-church theory, ought not to dispense it, to the very men who, on any high-church theory, ought not to receive it. He wrote a pamphlet on the Gorham case, but he does not practically propose to alter the constitution of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council; he has never proposed to bring in a bill for that purpose; he acquiesces in the supreme decision of the most secular court which can exist over the most peculiarly ecclesiastical questions that can be thought of. These successive changes do credit to Mr. Gladstone's good sense; they show that he has a susceptible nature, that he will not live out of sympathy with his age. But what must be the effect of such changes upon any mind, especially on a delicate and high-toned mind? They tend, and must tend, to confuse the first principles of belief; to disturb the best landmarks of consistency; to leave the mind open to attacks of oratorical impulse; to foster the catching habit of advocacy; to weaken the guiding element in a disposition which was already defective in that element. The "movement of 1833," as Father Newman calls it, has wrecked many fine intellects, has broken many promising careers. It could not do either for Mr. Gladstone, for his circumstances were favourable, and his mental energy was far too strong; but it has done him harm, nevertheless: it has left upon his intellect a weakening strain and a distorting mark.

Mr. Gladstone was a likely man to be enraptured with the first creed with which he was thrown, and to push it too far. He wants the warning instincts. Some one said of him formerly, "He may be a good Christian, but he is an atrocious pagan"; and the saying is true. He has not a trace of the protective morality of the old world, of the *modus in rebus*, the *μέσον*, the shrinking from an extreme, which are the prominent characteristics of the ethics of the old world, which are still the guiding creed of the large part of the world that is,—scarcely altered after two thousand years. And this much we may concede to the secular moralists—unless a man have from nature a selective tact which shuns the unlimited, unless he have a detective instinct which unconsciously but sensitively

shrinks from the extravagant, he will never enjoy a placid life, he will not pass through a simple and consistent career. The placid moderation which is necessary to coherent success cannot be acquired, it must be born.

Perhaps we may seem already to have more than accounted for the prominence of Mr. Gladstone's characteristic defects. We may seem to have alleged sufficient reasons for his being changeable and impulsive, a vehement advocate and an audacious financier. But we have other causes to assign which have aggravated these faults. We shall not, indeed, after what we have said, venture to dwell on them at length. We will bear in mind the precept, "If you wish to exhaust your readers, exhaust your subject". But we will very slightly allude to one of them.

A writer like Mr. Gladstone, fond of deriving illustration from the old theology, might speak of public life in England as an *economy*. It is a world of its own, far more than most Englishmen are aware of. It presents the characters of public men in a disguised form; and by requiring the seeming adoption of much which is not real, it tends to modify and to distort much which is real. An English statesman in the present day lives by following public opinion; he may profess to guide it a little; he may hope to modify it in detail; he may help to exaggerate and to develop it; but he hardly hopes for more. Many seem not willing to venture on so much. And what does this mean except that such a statesman has to follow the varying currents of a varying world; to adapt his public expressions, if not his private belief, to the tendencies of the hour; to be in no slight measure the slave—the petted and applauded slave, but still the slave—of the world which he seems to rule? Nor is this all. A Minister is not simply the servant of the public, he is likewise the advocate of his colleagues. No one supposes that a Cabinet can ever agree; when did fifteen able men—fifteen able men, more or less rivals—ever agree on anything? We are aware that differences of opinion, more or less radical, exist in every Cabinet; that the decisions of every Cabinet are in nearly every case modified by concession; that a minority of the Cabinet frequently dissents

from them. Yet all this latent discrepancy of opinion is never hinted at, much less is it ever avowed. A Cabinet Minister comes down to the House habitually to vote and occasionally to speak in favour of measures which he much dislikes, from which he has in vain attempted to dissuade his colleagues. The life of a great Minister is the life of a great advocate. No life can be imagined which is worse for a mind like Mr. Gladstone's. He was naturally changeable, susceptible, prone to unlimited statements — to vehement arguments. He has followed a career in which it is necessary to follow a changing guide and to obey more or less, but always to some extent, a fluctuating opinion; to argue vehemently for tenets which you dislike; to defend boldly a given law to-day, to propose boldly that the same law should be repealed to-morrow. Accumulated experience shows that the public life of our Parliamentary statesmen is singularly unsteadying, is painfully destructive of coherent principle; and we may easily conceive how dangerous it must be to a mind like Mr. Gladstone's—to a mind, by its intrinsic nature, impressible, impetuous, and unfixed.

What, then, is to be the future course of the remarkable statesman whose excellences and whose faults we have ventured to analyse at such length? No wise man would venture to predict. A wise man does not predict much in this complicated world, least of all will he predict the exact course of a perplexing man in perplexing circumstances. But we will hazard three general remarks.

First, Mr. Gladstone is essentially a man who cannot impose his creed *on* his time, but must learn his creed *of* his time. Every Parliamentary statesman must, as we have said, do so in some measure; but Mr. Gladstone must do so above all men. The vehement orator, the impulsive advocate, the ingenious but somewhat unsettled thinker, is the last man from whom we should expect an original policy, a steady succession of mature and consistent designs. Mr. Gladstone may well be the expositor of his time, the advocate of its conclusions, the admired orator in whom it will take pride; but he cannot be more. Parliamentary life rarely admits the autocratic supremacy of an original intellect; the present moment is singularly unfavourable to it; Mr. Gladstone is the last man to obtain it.

Secondly, Mr. Gladstone will fail if he follow the seductive example of Sir Robert Peel. It is customary to talk of the unfavourable circumstances in which the latter was placed, but in one respect those circumstances were favourable. He had very unusual means of learning the ideas of his time. They were forced upon him by a loud and organised agitation. The repeal of the corn-laws, the repeal of the Catholic disabilities—the two Acts by which he will be remembered—were not chosen by him, but exacted from him. The world around him clamoured for them. But no future statesman can hope to have such an advantage. The age in which Peel lived was an age of destruction: the measures by which he will be remembered were abolitions. We have now reached the term of the destructive period. We cannot abolish all our laws; we have few remaining with which educated men find fault. The questions which remain are questions of construction—how the lower classes are to be admitted to a share of political power without absorbing the whole power; how the natural union of Church and State is to be adapted to an age of divided religious opinion, and to the necessary conditions of a Parliamentary government. These, and such as these, are the future topics of our home policy. And on these the voice of the nation will never be very distinct. Destruction is easy, construction is very difficult. A statesman who will hereafter learn what our real public opinion is, will not have to regard loud agitators, but to disregard them; will not have to yield to a loud voice, but to listen for a still small voice; will have to seek for the opinion which is treasured in secret rather than for that which is noised abroad. If Mr. Gladstone will accept the conditions of his age; if he will guide himself by the mature, settled, and cultured reflection of his time, and not by its loud and noisy organs; if he will look for that which is thought, rather than for that which is said—he may leave a great name, be useful to his country, may steady and balance his own mind. But if not, not. The coherent efficiency of his career will depend on the the guide which he takes, the index which he obeys, the *δαιμων* which he consults.

There are two topics which are especially critical. Mr.

Gladstone must not object to war because it is war, or to expenditure because it is expenditure. Upon these two points Mr. Gladstone has shown a tendency—not, we hope, an uncontrollable tendency, but still a tendency—to differ from the best opinion of the age. He has been unfortunately placed. His humane and Christian feeling are opposed to war; he has a financial ideal which has been distorted, if not destroyed, by a growing expenditure. But war is often necessary; finance is not an end; money is but a means. A statesman who would lead his age must learn its duties. It may be that the defence of England, the military defence, is one of our duties. If so, we must not sit down to count the cost. If so, it is not the age for arithmetic. If so, it is for our statesmen—it is especially for Mr. Gladstone, who is the most splendidly gifted amongst them—to sacrifice cherished hopes; to forego treasured schemes; to put out of their thoughts the pleasant duties of a pacific time; to face the barbarism of war; to vanquish the instinctive shrinkings of a delicate mind.

Lastly, Mr. Gladstone must beware how he again commits himself to a long period of bewildering opposition. Office is a steadying situation. A Minister has means of learning from his colleagues, from his subordinates, from unnumbered persons who are only too ready to give him information, what the truth is, and what public opinion is. Opposition, on the other hand, is an exciting and a misleading situation. The bias of every one who is so placed is to oppose the Ministry. Yet on a hundred questions the Ministry are likely to be right. They have special information, long consultations, skilled public servants to guide them. On most points there is no misleading motive. Every Minister decides, to the best of his ability, upon most of the questions which come before him. A bias to oppose him, therefore, is always dangerous. It is peculiarly dangerous to those in whom the contentious impulse is strong, whose life is in debate. If Mr. Gladstone's mind is to be kept in a useful track, it must be by the guiding influence of office, by an exemption from the misguiding influence of opposition.

No one desires more than we do that Mr. Gladstone's future course should be enriched, not only with oratorical fame,

but with useful power. Such gifts as his are amongst the rarest that are given to men; they are amongst the most valuable; they are singularly suited to our Parliamentary life. England cannot afford to lose such a man. If in the foregoing pages we have seemed often to find fault, it has not been for the sake of finding fault. It is *necessary* that England should comprehend Mr. Gladstone. If the country have not a true conception of a great statesman, his popularity will be capricious, his power irregular, and his usefulness insecure.

MEMOIR OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES WILSON.[1]

(1860.)

PERHAPS some of the subscribers to the *Economist* would not be unwilling to read a brief memoir of Mr. Wilson, even if the events narrated were in no respect peculiar. They might possibly be interested in the biography of an author of whose writings they have read so many, even if the narrative related no marked transitions and no characteristic events. But there were in Mr. Wilson's life several striking changes. The scene shifts from the manufactory of a small Scotch hatter in a small Scotch town, to London—to the Imperial Parliament—to the English Treasury—to the Council Board of India. Such a biography may be fairly expected to have some interest. The life perhaps of no *Political Economist* has been more eventful.

James Wilson was born at Hawick, in Roxburghshire, on 3rd June, 1805. His father, of whose memory he always spoke with marked respect, was a thriving man of business, extensively engaged in the woollen manufacture of that place. He was the fourth son in a family of fifteen children, of whom, however, only ten reached maturity. Of his mother, who died when he was very young, he scarcely retained any remembrance in after-life. As to his early years little is now recollected, except that he was a very mild and serious boy, usually successful during school hours, but not usually successful in the play-ground.

As Mr. Wilson's father was an influential Quaker, he was

[1] This was published as a supplement to the *Economist*, soon after Mr. Wilson's death in 1860.

sent when ten years old to a Quaker school at Ackworth, where he continued for four years. At that time—it may surprise some of those who knew him in later life to be told —he was so extremely fond of books as to wish to be a teacher; and as his father allowed his sons to choose their line in life, he was sent to a seminary at Earl's Colne in Essex, to qualify himself for that occupation. But the taste did not last long. As we might expect, the natural activity of his disposition soon induced him to regret his choice of a sedentary life. He wrote to Hawick, "I would rather be the most menial servant in my father's mill than be a teacher"; and he was permitted to return home at once.

Many years later he often narrated that after leaving Earl's Colne, he had much wished to study for the Scottish Bar, but the rules of the Society of Friends, as then understood, would not allow his father to consent to the plan. He was sometimes inclined half to regret that he had not been able to indulge this taste, and he was much pleased at being told by a great living advocate that "if he had gone to the Bar he would have been very successful". But at the time there was no alternative, and at sixteen he accordingly commenced a life of business. He did not, however, lose at once his studious predilections. For some years at least he was in the habit of reading a good deal, very often till late in the night. It was indeed then that he acquired almost all the knowledge of books which he ever possessed. In later life he was much too busy to be a regular reader, and he never acquired the habit of catching easily the contents of books or even of articles in the interstices of other occupations. Whatever he did, he did thoroughly. He would not read even an article in a newspaper if he could well help doing so; but if he read it at all, it was with as much slow, deliberate attention as if he were perusing a Treasury minute.

At the early age we have mentioned he commenced his business life by being apprenticed to a small hat manufacturer at Hawick; and it is still remembered that he showed remarkable care and diligence in mastering all the *minutiæ* of the trade. There was, indeed, nothing of the *amateur* man

of business about him at any time. After a brief interval his father purchased his master's business for him and for an elder brother, named William, and the two brothers in conjunction continued to carry it on at Hawick during two or three years with much energy. So small a town, however, as Hawick then was, afforded no scope for enterprise in this branch of manufacture, and they resolved to transfer themselves to London.

Accordingly, in 1824, Mr. Wilson commenced a mercantile life in London (the name of the firm being Wilson, Irwin & Wilson), and was very prosperous and successful for many years. His pecuniary gains were considerable, and to the practical instruction which he then obtained he always ascribed his success as an economist and a financier. "Before I was twenty years of age," he said at Devonport in 1859, "I was partner in a firm in London, and I can only say, if there is in my life one event which I regard with satisfaction more than another, it is that I had then an opportunity of obtaining experience by observation which has contributed in the main to what little public utility I have since been to my country. During these few years I became acquainted—well acquainted—with the middle classes of this country. I also became acquainted in some degree with the working classes; and also, to a great extent, with the foreign commerce of this country in pretty nearly all parts of the world; and I can only say the information and the experience I thus derived have been to me in my political career of greater benefit than I can now describe."

In 1831 the firm of Wilson, Irwin & Wilson was dissolved by mutual consent. But Mr. Wilson (under the firm of James Wilson & Co.) continued to carry on the same kind of business, and continued to obtain the same success. He began in 1824 with £2000, the gift of his father, and in 1837 was worth nearly £25,000—a fair result for so short a period, and evincing a steady business-like capacity and judgment; for it was the fruit not of sudden success in casual speculation, but of regular attention during several years to one business. From circumstances which we shall presently

state, he was very anxious that this part of his career should be very clearly understood.

During these years Mr. Wilson led the life of a prosperous and intellectual man of business. He married,[1] and formed an establishment suitable to his means, first near his manufactory in London, and afterwards at Dulwich. He took great pleasure in such intellectual society as he could obtain; was specially fond of conversing on political economy, politics, statistics, and the other subjects with which he was subsequently so busily occupied.[2] Through life it was one of his remarkable peculiarities to be a *very animated* man, talking by preference and by habit on *inanimate* subjects. All the *verve*, vigour, and life which lively people put into exciting pursuits, he put into topics which are usually thought very dry. He discussed the Currency or the Corn-laws with a relish and energy which made them interesting to almost every one. "How pleasant it is," he used to say, "to talk a subject out," and he frequently suggested theories in the excitement of conversation upon his favourite topics which he had never thought of before, but to which he ever afterwards attached, as was natural, much importance. The instructiveness of his conversation was greatly increased as his mind progressed and his experience accumulated. But his genial liveliness and animated vigour were the same during his early years of business life as they were afterwards when he filled important offices of State in England and in Calcutta. Few men can have led a more continuously prosperous and happy life than

[1] He was married on 5th January, 1832, to Miss Elizabeth Preston, of Newcastle, and this has given rise to a statement that he was once in business at Newcastle. This is, however, an entire mistake. He was never in business anywhere except at Hawick and London. It may be added, that on the occasion of his marriage he voluntarily ceased to be a member of the Society of Friends, for whom he always, however, retained a high respect. During the rest of his life he was a member of the Church of England.

[2] Among his friends of this period, should be especially mentioned Mr. G. R. Porter, of the Board of Trade, the author of *The Progress of the Nation*, whose mind he described twenty years later as the most accurate he had ever known.

he did during those years. Unfortunately it was not to continue.

In 1836, or thereabouts, Mr. Wilson was unfortunately induced to commence a speculation in indigo, in conjunction with a gentleman in Scotland. It was expected that indigo would be scarce, and that the price would rise rapidly in consequence. Such would indeed appear to have been the case for a short period, since the first purchases in which Mr. Wilson took part yielded a profit. In consequence of this success, he was induced to try a larger venture,—indeed to embark most of his disposable capital. Unfortunately, the severe crisis of 1837 disturbed the usual course of all trades, and from its effect or from some other cause, indigo, instead of rising rapidly, fell rapidly. The effect on Mr. Wilson's position may be easily guessed. A very great capitalist would have been able to hold till better times, but he was not. "On 1st January," he said at Devonport, "in a given year, my capital was nearer £25,000 than £24,000, and it was all lost." Numerous stories were long circulated, most of them exaggerated, and the remainder wholly untrue, as to this period of misfortune in Mr. Wilson's life; but the truth is very simple. As is usual in such cases, various arrangements were proposed and agreed to, were afterwards abandoned, and others substituted for them. A large bundle of papers carefully preserved by him records with the utmost accuracy the whole of the history. The final result will be best described in his own words at Devonport, which precisely correspond with the balance sheets and other documents still in existence. They are part of a speech in answer to a calumnious rumour that had been circulated in the town:—

"Now, how did I act on this occasion? and this is what this placard has reference to. By my own means alone, I was enabled at once to satisfy in full all claims against me individually, and to provide for the early payment of one-half of the whole of the demands against the firm, consisting of myself and three partners. I was further enabled, or the firm was enabled, at once to assign property of sufficient value, as was supposed, to the full satisfaction of the whole

of the remainder of the liabilities. An absolute agreement was made, an absolute release was given, to all the partners; there was neither a bankruptcy nor insolvency, neither was the business stopped for one day. The business was continued under the new firm, with which I remained a partner, and from which I ultimately retired in good circumstances. Some years afterwards it turned out that the foreign property which was assigned for the remaining half of the debts of the old firm, of which I was formerly a partner, proved insufficient to discharge them. The legal liability was, as you know, all gone; the arrangement had been accepted—an arrangement calculated and believed by all parties to be sufficient to satisfy all claims in full; but when the affairs of the whole concern were fully wound up, finding that the foreign property had not realised what was anticipated, I had it, I am glad to say, in my power to place at my banker's, having ascertained the amount, a sum of money to discharge all the remainder of that debt, which I considered morally, though not legally, due. This I did without any kind of solicitation—the thing was not named to me, and I am quite sure never were the gentlemen more taken by surprise than when a friend of mine waited on them privately in London, and presented each of them with a cheque for the balance due to them. Now, perhaps, I have myself to blame for this anonymous attack. I probably brought it on myself, for I always felt that if this matter were made public, it might look like an act of ostentatious obtrusion on my part, and therefore, when I put aside the sum of money necessary for the purpose, I made a request, in the letter I wrote to my bankers, desiring them as an especial favour that they would instruct their clerks to mention the matter to no one; and in order that it should be perfectly private, I employed a personal friend of my own in the city of London, in whose care I placed the whole of the cheques, to wait on those gentlemen and present each of them with a cheque, and I obtained from him a promise, and he from them, not to name the circumstance to any one." The secrecy thus enjoined was well preserved. Many of the most intimate friends of Mr.

Wilson, and his family also, were entirely unacquainted with what he had done, and learnt it only through the accidental medium of an electioneering speech. It may be added, too, that some of those who knew the circumstances, and who have watched Mr. Wilson's subsequent career, believe that at no part of his life did he show greater business ability, self-command, and energy, than at the crisis of his mercantile misfortunes.

It is remarkable that the preface to Mr. Wilson's first pamphlet, on the *Influences of the Corn-laws*, is dated 1st March, 1839, the precise time at which he was negotiating with his creditors for a proper arrangement of his affairs; and to those who have had an opportunity of observing how completely pecuniary misfortune unnerves and unmans men —mercantile men, perhaps, more than any others—it will not seem unworthy of remark that a careful pamphlet, with elaborate figures, instinct in every line with vigour and energy, should emanate from a man struggling with extreme pecuniary calamity, and daily harassed with the painful details of it.

After 1839 Mr. Wilson continued in business for several years, and with very fair success, considering that his capital was much diminished, and that the hat manufacture was in a state of transition. He finally retired in 1844, and invested most of his capital in the foundation and extension of the *Economist*.

These facts prove, as we believe, the conclusion which he was very desirous to make clear—that, though unfortunate on a particular occasion, Mr. Wilson was by no means, as a rule, unsuccessful in business. He did not at all like to have it said that he was fit to lay down the rules and the theory of business, but not fit to transact business itself. And the whole of his life, on the contrary, proves that he possessed an unusual capacity for affairs—an extraordinary *transacting* ability.

It may, however, be admitted that Mr. Wilson was in several respects by no means an unlikely man to meet, especially in early life, with occasional misfortune. To the last hour of his life he was always sanguine. He naturally looked at everything in a bright and cheerful aspect; his tendency was always

to form a somewhat too favourable judgment both of things and men. One proof of this may be sufficient: he was five years Secretary of the Treasury, and he did not leave it a suspicious man.

Moreover, Mr. Wilson's temperament was very active and his mind was very fertile. And though in many parts of business these gifts are very advantageous, in many also they are very dangerous, if not absolutely disadvantageous. Frequently they are temptations. Capital is always limited; often it is *very* limited; and therefore a man of business, who is managing his own capital, has only defined resources, and can engage only in a certain number of undertakings. But a person of active temperament and fertile mind will soon chafe at that restriction. His inventiveness will show him many ways in which money might easily be made, and he cannot but feel that with his energies he would like to make it. If he have besides a sanguine temperament, he will believe that he can make it. The records of unfortunate commerce abound in instances of men who have been unsuccessful because they had great mind, great energy, and great hope, but had not money in proportion. Some part of this description was, perhaps, applicable to Mr. Wilson in 1839, but exactly how much cannot, after the lapse of so many years, be now known with any accuracy.

Mr. Wilson's position in middle life was by no means unsuitable to a writer on the subjects in which he afterwards attained eminence. He had acquired a great knowledge of business through a long course of industrious years; he had proved by habitual success in business that his habitual judgment on it was sound and good. If he had been a man of only ordinary energy and only ordinary ability, he would probably have continued to grow regularly richer and richer. But by a single error natural to a very sanguine temperament and a very active mind, he had destroyed a great part of the results of his industry. He had a new career to seek. He was willing to expend on it the whole of his great energies. He was ready to take all the pains which were necessary to fit himself for success. When he wrote his first pamphlet he used

to say that he thought "the sentences never would come right". In later life he considered three leading articles in the *Economist*, full of facts and figures, an easy morning's work, which would not prevent his doing a good deal else too. Mr. Wilson was a finished man of business obliged by necessity to become a writer on business. Perhaps no previous education and no temporary circumstances could be conceived more likely to train a great financial writer and to stimulate his powers.

In 1839 Mr. Wilson published his *Influences of the Corn-laws;* in 1840, the *Fluctuations of Currency, Commerce, and Manufactures;* in 1841, *The Revenue; or, What should the Chancellor do?* in September, 1843, he established the *Economist*. The origin of the latter may be interesting to our readers. Mr. Wilson proposed to the editor of the *Examiner* that he should furnish gratuitously a certain amount of writing to that journal on economic and financial subjects; but the offer was declined, though with some regret, on account of the expense of type and paper. A special paper was, therefore, established, which proved in the end as important as the *Examiner* itself. From the first, Mr. Wilson was the sole proprietor of the *Economist*, though he obtained pecuniary assistance—especially from the kindness of Lord Radnor. He embarked some capital of his own in it from the first, and afterwards repaid all loans made to him for the purpose of establishing it.

It would not be suitable to the design of this memoir to give any criticism of Mr. Wilson's pamphlets, still less would it become the *Economist* to pronounce in any manner a judgment on itself. Nevertheless, it is a part of the melancholy duty we have undertaken to give some account of Mr. Wilson's characteristic position as a writer on Political Economy, and of the somewhat peculiar mode in which he dealt with that subject.

Mr. Wilson dealt with Political Economy like a practical man. Persons more familiar with the literature of science might very easily be found. Mr. Wilson's faculty of reading was small, nor had he any taste for the more refined abstractions in which the more specially scientific political economists had involved themselves. "Political Economy," said Sydney

Smith, "is become in the hands of Malthus and Ricardo, a school of metaphysics. All seem to agree what is to be done; the contention is how the subject is to be divided and defined. *Meddle with no such matters.*" We are far from alleging that this saying is just; nor would Mr. Wilson have by any means assented to it. But though he would have disavowed it in theory, it nevertheless embodies his instinctive feeling and characteristic practice. He "meddled with no such matters"; though he did not deny the utility of theoretical refinements, he habitually and steadily avoided them.

Mr. Wilson's predominating power was what may be called a business imagination. He had a great power of conceiving transactions. Political economy was to him the science of buying and selling, and of the ordinary bargains of men he had a very steady and distinct conception. In explaining such subjects he did not begin, as political economists have been wittily said to do, with "Suppose a man upon an island," but "What they do in the city is this. The real course of business is so and so." Most men of business will think this characteristic a great merit, aad even a theoretical economist should not consider it a defect. The *practical* value of the science of political economy (the observation is an old one as to *all* sciences) lies in its "middle principles". The extreme abstractions from which such intermediate maxims are scientifically deduced lie at some distance from ordinary experience, and are not easily made intelligible to most persons, and when they *are* made intelligible, most persons do not know how to use them. But the intermediate maxims themselves are not so difficult; they are easily comprehended and easily used. They have in them a practical life, and come home at once to the "business" and the "bosoms" of men. It was in these that Mr. Wilson excelled. His "business imagination" enabled him to see "what men did," and "why they did it"; "why they ought to do it," and "why they ought not to do it". His very clear insight into the real nature of mercantile transactions made him a great and almost an instinctive master of *statistical selection.* He could not help picking out of a mass of figures those which would tell most. He saw which were

really material; he put them prominently and plainly forward, and he left the rest alone. Even now if a student of Parliamentary papers should alight on a return "moved for by Mr. Wilson," he will do well to give to it a more than ordinary attention, for it will be sure to contain something attainable, intelligible, and distinct.

Mr. Wilson's habit of always beginning with the facts, always arguing from the facts, and always ending with a result applicable to the facts, obtained for his writings an influence and a currency more extensive than would have been anticipated for any writings on political economy. It is not for the *Economist* to speak of the *Economist;* but we may observe that through the pages of this journal certain doctrines, whether true or false, have been diffused far more widely than they ever were in England before—far more widely than from their somewhat abstract nature we could expect them to be diffused—far more widely than they are diffused in any other country but this. The business-like method and vigorous simplicity of Mr. Wilson's arguments converted very many ordinary men of business, who would have distrusted any theoretical and abstruse disquisition, and would not have appreciated any elaborate refinements. Nor was this special influence confined to mercantile men. It penetrated where it could not be expected to penetrate. The Duke of Wellington was, perhaps, more likely to be prejudiced against a theoretical political economist than any eminent man of his day; he belonged to the "pre-scientific period"; he had much of the impatient practicality incident to military insight; he was not likely to be very partial to the "doctrines of Mr. Huskisson";—nevertheless, the Duke early pointed out Mr. Wilson's writings to Lord Brougham as possessing especial practical value; and when the Duke at a much later period was disposed to object to the repeal of the Navigation Laws, Mr. Wilson had a special interview to convince him of its expediency.

Nor is this faculty of exposition by any means a trifling power. On many subjects it is a common saying "that he only discovers who proves"; but in practical politics we may

almost say that he only discovers who convinces. It is of no use to have practical truths received by extraordinary men, unless they are also accepted by ordinary men. Whether Mr. Wilson was exactly a great writer, we will not discuss: but he was a great *belief-producer;* he had upon his own subjects a singular gift of *efficient* argument—a peculiar power of bringing home his opinions by convincing reasons to convincible persons.

The time at which Mr. Wilson commenced his career as an economical writer was a singularly happy one. An economical century has elapsed since 1839. The Corn-laws were then in full force, and seemed likely to continue so; the agriculturists believed in them, and other classes acquiesced in them; the tentative reforms of Mr. Huskisson were half forgotten; our tariff perhaps contained some specimen of every defect—it certainly contained many specimens of most defects; duties abounded which cramped trade, which contributed nothing to the Exchequer, which were maintained that a minority might believe they profited at the expense of the majority; all the now settled principles of commercial policy were unsettled; the "currency" was under discussion; the Bank of England had been reduced to accept a loan from the Bank of France; capitalists were disheartened and operatives disaffected; the industrial energies, which have since multiplied our foreign commerce, were then effectually impeded by legislative fetters and financial restraints. On almost all of these restraints Mr. Wilson had much to say.

Upon the Corn-laws Mr. Wilson developed a theory which was rare when he first stated it, but which was generally adopted afterwards, and which subsequent experience has confirmed. He was fond of narrating an anecdote which shows his exact position in 1839. There had just been a meeting of the Anti-Corn-law League at Manchester, and some speakers had maintained, with more or less vehemence, that the coming struggle was to be one of class against class, inasmuch as the Corn-laws were beneficial to the agriculturists, though they were injurious to manufacturers. The tendency of the argument was to set one part of the nation against another part.

Mr. Wilson was travelling in the North, and was writing in a railway carriage part of the *Influences of the Corn-laws.* By chance a distinguished member of the League, whom Mr. Wilson did not know, happened to travel with him, and asked him what he was about. "I am writing on the Corn-laws," said Mr. Wilson, "something in answer to the rubbish they have been talking at Manchester." "You are a bold man," was the reply; "Protection is a difficult doctrine to support by argument". But it soon appeared that Mr. Wilson was the better Free-trader of the two. He held that the Corn-laws were injurious to all classes; that the agriculturists suffered from them as much as the manufacturers; that, in consequence, it was "rubbish" to raise a class-enmity on the subject, for the interest of all classes was the same.

"We cannot too much lament," he says in his *Influences of the Corn-laws*, "and deprecate the spirit of violence and exaggeration with which this subject has always been approached by each party, which no doubt has been the chief cause why so little of real truth or benefit has resulted from the efforts of either; the arguments on either side have been supported by such absurd and magnified statements of the influences of those prohibitory laws on their separate interests, as only to furnish each other with a good handle to turn the whole argument into ridicule. It therefore appears to be necessary to a just settlement of this great question, that these two parties should be first reconciled to a correct view of the real influences thus exerted over their interests, and the interests of the country at large; to a conviction that the imaginary fears of change on the one hand, and the exaggerated advantages expected on the other hand, are equally without foundation; that there are in reality no differences in the solid interests of either party; and that *individuals*, *communities*, or *countries* can only be prosperous in proportion to the prosperity of the whole." And he proposed to prove "that the agricultural interest has derived no benefit, but great injury, from the existing laws; and that the fears and apprehensions entertained of the ruinous consequences which would result to this interest by the adoption of a free and liberal policy with respect to the trade in corn, are without any foundation; that the value of this property, instead of being depreciated, in the aggregate, would be rather enhanced, and the general interests of the owners most decidedly enhanced thereby;" and, "that while incalculable benefit would arise to the manufacturing interest and the working population generally, in common with all classes of the community, from the adoption of such policy, nothing can be more erroneous than the belief that the price of provisions or labour would on the average be thereby cheapened, but

that, on the contrary, the tendency would rather be to produce, by a state of generally increased prosperity, a higher average rate of each ".

Whatever might be thought in 1839, in 1860 we can on one point have no doubt whatever. The repeal of the Corn-laws has been followed by the exact effect which Mr. Wilson anticipated. Whether his argument was right or wrong, the result has corresponded with his anticipation. The agriculturists have prospered more—the manufacturers, the merchants, the operatives, all classes in a word, have prospered more since the Corn-laws were repealed, than they ever did before. As to abstract questions of politics there will always be many controversies; but upon a patent contemporaneous fact of this magnitude there cannot be a controversy.

It is indisputable also that, for the purposes of the Anti-Corn-law agitation, Mr. Wilson's view was exceedingly opportune. Mr. Cobden said not long ago (we quote the substance correctly even if the words are wrong), "I never made any progress with the Corn-law question while it was stated as a question of class against class". And a careful inquirer will find that such is the real moral of the whole struggle. If it had continued to be considered solely or mainly as a manufacturer's question, it might not have been settled to this hour. In support of this opinion, Mr. Wilson made many speeches at the meetings of the Anti-Corn-law League, though he had little taste for the task of agitation.

We cannot give even an analysis of Mr. Wilson's arguments—our space is too brief—but we will enumerate one or two of the principal points.

He maintained that, under our protective laws, the agriculturists never had the benefit of a high price, and always suffered the evil of a low price. When our crop was scanty, it was necessary to sell the small quantity at a high price, or the farmer could not be remunerated. But exactly at that moment foreign corn was permitted by law to be imported. In consequence, during bad years the farmer was exposed to difficulty and disaster, which were greater because, in expectation of an English demand, large stocks were often hoarded on the Continent, and at once poured in to prevent

the home-grower compensating himself for a bad harvest by an equivalent rise of price.

Nor was the farmer better off in very plentiful years. There was a surplus in this country, and that surplus could not be exported, for the price of wheat was always lower abroad than here. The effect is evident. As corn is an article of the first necessity, a certain quantity of it will always be consumed, but more than that quantity will not be readily consumed. A slight surplus is, therefore, invariably found to lower the price of such articles excessively. In very good years the farmer had to sell his crop at an unremuneratingly low price, while in very bad years he was prevented from obtaining the high price which alone could compensate him for his outlay. Between the effects of the two sorts of years his condition was deplorable, and Parliamentary committees were constantly appointed to investigate it.

Mr. Wilson also explained how much these fluctuations in price contracted the home demand for agricultural produce. The manufacturing districts were, he showed, subjected by the Corn-laws to alternate periods of great excitement and great depression. When corn was very cheap, the mass of the community had much to spend on other things; when corn was very dear, they had very little to spend on those things. In consequence, the producers of "other things" were sometimes stimulated by a great demand, and at other times deadened by utter slackness. The labouring classes in the manufacturing districts acquired in periods of plenty a certain taste for what to them were luxuries, and in periods of scarcity were naturally soured at being deprived of them. The manufacturers were frequently induced to invest additional capital by sudden angmentations of demand, and were often ruined by its sudden cessation. It was therefore impossible that the manufacturing classes could be steady customers of the agriculturists, for their own condition was fluctuating and unsteady.

Mr. Wilson also showed that if the landed interest was injured by the effects of the Corn-laws, this was of itself enough to injure the manufacturing interests.

"The connection," he wrote, "between the manufacturer and the landed interest in this country is much closer than is generally admitted or believed; not only is the manufacturer dependent on the landed interest for the large portion of his goods which they immediately consume, but also for a very large portion of what he exports to the most distant countries. All commerce is, either directly or indirectly, a simple exchange of the surplus products of one country for those of another. It is therefore a first essential that we should be able to take the cotton of America, the sugar and coffee of India, the silk and teas of China, before they can take our manufactures; and if this be necessary, then must it follow that in proportion to the extent to which we can take their produce, will they be enabled to take our manufactures. Therefore, whatever portion of these products is consumed in this country by the landed interest, must to that extent enable the manufacturer to export his goods in return; and thus any causes which increase this ability on the part of the landed interest to consume, must give a corresponding additional ability to the manufacturers to export. Every pound of coffee or sugar, every ounce of tea, every article of luxury, the produce of foreign climes, whether consumed within the castles and halls of our wealthiest landowners, or in the humble cottages of our lowliest peasantry, alike represent some portion of the exports of this country. On the other hand, the dependence of the landowner is no less twofold on the manufacturer and merchant. He is not only dependent upon them for their own immediate consumption, but also for the consumption of whatever food enters into the cost price of their goods. Although the English farmer does not export his corn or his other produce in the exact shape and form in which he produces them, they constitute not the less on that account a distinct portion of the exports of this country, and that in the best of all possible forms. Just as much as the manufacturer exports the wool or the silk which enters into the fabrics of those materials, does he export the corn which paid for the labour of spinning and weaving them. It would be an utter impossibility that this country could consume its agricultural produce but for our extensive manufacturing population; or that the value of what would be consumed could be near its present rate. If without this aid our agricultural produce were as great as it now is, a large portion would have to seek a market in distant countries: it would then have to be exported in the exact form in which it is produced; the expenses of which being so large would reduce very greatly from its value and net price, and the landed interest would be immediately affected thereby. But, as it is, the produce of the land is exported in the condensed form of manufactured goods, at a comparatively trifling expense, which secures a high value to it here. Thus, for example, a few bales of silk or woollen goods may contain as much wheat in their value as would freight a whole ship. To this advantage the landed interest is indebted, exclusively, for the very superior value of property and produce

in this country to any other; because, by our great manufacturing superiority, a market is found for our produce over the whole world, conveyed in the cheapest and most condensed form. While the Chinese, or Indians, buy our cottons, our silks, or our woollens, they buy a portion of the grain and other produce of the land of this country; and therefore the producer here, while indulging in the delicacies or luxuries of Oriental climes, may only be consuming a portion of the golden heads of wheat which had gracefully waved in his own fields at a former day. Is it not, therefore, sufficiently clear that no circumstance whatever can either improve or injure one of these interests without immediately in the same way affecting the other? The connection is so close that it is impossible to separate or distinguish them. Any circumstance which limits our commerce must limit our market for agricultural produce; and any possible circumstance which deteriorates the condition of our agriculturists must deteriorate our commerce, by limiting our imports, and consequently our exports. These are general principles, and are capable of extension to the whole world, in all places, and at all times; and the same principle as is thus shown to connect and combine the different interests of any one country, just as certainly operates in producing a similar effect between different countries; and we ardently hope, ere long, to find not only the petty jealousies between different portions of the same community entirely removed, but that all countries will learn that a free and unrestricted co-operation with each other in matters of commerce can only tend to the general benefit and welfare of all."

We do not say that these propositions were exactly discoveries of Mr. Wilson. During the exciting discussion of a great public question, the most important truths which relate to it are "in the air" of the age; many persons see them, or half see them; and it is impossible to trace the precise parentage of any of them. But we do say that these opinions were exactly suited to the broad and practical understanding of Mr. Wilson; that they were very effectively illustrated by him—more effectively probably than by any other writer; that he thought them out for himself with but little knowledge of previous theories; that they, principally, raised Free-trade from a class question to a national question; that to them, whether advocated by Mr. Wilson or by others, the success of the Anti-Corn-law agitation was in a great measure owing; that whatever doubt may formerly have been felt, an ample trial has now proved them to be true.

Mr. Wilson's pamphlet entitled *The Revenue; or, What*

should the Chancellor do? which attracted considerable attention when it was published in 1841, is worth reading now, though dated so many years ago; for it contains an outline of the financial policy which Sir Robert Peel commenced, and which Mr. Gladstone has now almost completed. This pamphlet, which is not very short (it has twenty-seven moderate pages), was begun as an article for the *Morning Chronicle*, but proved too long for that purpose. It was written with almost inconceivable rapidity—nearly all, we believe, in a single night—though its principles and its many figures will bear a critical scrutiny even now.

In the briefest memoir of Mr. Wilson it is necessary to say something of the currency; but it will not be advisable to say very much. If, however, we could rely on the patience of our readers, we should say a good deal. On no subject, perhaps, did Mr. Wilson take up a more characteristic position. He saw certain broad principles distinctly and steadily, and to these he firmly adhered, no matter what refined theories were suggested, or what the opinion of others might be.

Mr. Wilson was a stern bullionist. He held that a five-pound note was a promise to pay five pounds. He answered Sir R. Peel's question, "What is a pound?" with Sir Robert's own answer. He said it was a certain specified quantity of gold metal. He held that all devices for aiding industry by issuing inconvertible notes were certainly foolish, and might perhaps be mischievous. He held that industry could only be really aided by additional *capital*—by new machines, new instruments, new raw material; that an addition to a paper *currency* was as useless to aid deficient capital as it was to feed a hungry population.

Mr. Wilson held, secondly, that the *sine quâ non*, the great prerequisite to a good paper currency, was the maintenance of an adequate reserve by the issuer. He believed that a banker should look at his liabilities as a whole—the notes which he has in circulation and the deposits he has in his ledger taken together; and should retain a sufficient portion of them (say one-third) in cash, or in something equivalent to cash, in daily readiness to pay them at once. Mr. Wilson considered that

bankers might be trusted to keep such a reserve, as they would be ruined, sooner or later, if they did not; and if the notes issued by them were always convertible at the pleasure of the holder, he believed that the currency would never be depreciated.

He thought, however, that, as bank-notes must pass from hand to hand in the market, and as in practice most persons—most traders, especially—must take them in payment whether they wish to do so or not, some special security might properly be required for their payment. He would have allowed any one who liked to issue bank-notes on depositing Consols to a sufficient amount—the amount, that is, of the notes issued, and an adequate percentage in addition.

Lastly, Mr. Wilson believed that the bank-note circulation exercised quite a secondary and unimportant influence upon prices and upon transactions, in comparison with the auxiliary currency of cheques and credits, which has indefinitely augmented during the last thirty years. So far from regarding the public as constantly ready for an unlimited supply of bank-notes, he thought that it was only in times of extreme panic, when this auxiliary currency is diminished and disturbed, that the bank-notes in the hands of the public either could or would be augmented. He believed that the public only kept in their hands as many notes as they wanted for their own convenience, and that all others were in the present day paid back to the banker immediately and necessarily.

Unfortunately, however, the currency is not discussed in England with very exact reference to abstract principles. The popular question of every thinker is, "Are you in favour of Peel's Bill, or are you against it?" And this mode of discussing the subject always placed Mr. Wilson in a position of some difficulty. He concurred in the aim of Sir R. Peel, but objected to his procedure. He wished to secure the convertibility of the bank-note. He believed that the Act of 1844 indirectly induced the Bank Directors to keep more bullion than they would keep otherwise, and in so far he thought it beneficial; but he also thought that the advantages obtained by it were purchased at a needless price; that they might have been

obtained much more cheaply; that the machinery of the Act aggravated every panic; that it tended to fix the attention of the public on bank-notes, and so fostered the mischievous delusion that the augmented issue of paper currency would strengthen industry; that it neglected to take account of other forms of credit which are equally important with bank-notes; that, "*for one week in ten years*"—the week of panic—it created needless and intense apprehension, and so tended to cause the ruin of some solvent commercial men. In brief, though he fully believed the professed object of Sir R. Peel—the convertibility of the bank-note—to be beneficial and inestimable, he as fully believed the special means selected by him to be inconvenient and pernicious.

Opinions akin to Mr. Wilson's, if not identical with them, are very commonly now entertained, both by practical men of business and by professional economists. The younger school of thinkers who have had before them the working of the Act of 1844 and the events of 1847 and 1857, and are not committed by any of the older controversies, are especially inclined to them. Yet from peculiar causes they have not been so popular as Mr. Wilson's other opinions. His views of finance and of the effect of Free-trade, which were half heresies when he announced them, have now become almost axioms. But the truth of his currency theory is still warmly controverted. The reason is this: Sir R. Peel's Act is a sort of compromise which is suited to the English people. It was probably intended by its author as a preliminary step; it undoubtedly suits no strict theory; it certainly has great marks of incompleteness; but, "it works tolerably well"; if it produces evils at a crisis, "crises come but seldom"; in ordinary times commerce "goes on very fairly". The pressure of practical evil upon the English people has never yet been so great as to induce them to face the unpleasant difficulties of the abstract currency question. Mr. Wilson's opinions have, therefore, never been considered by practical men for a practical object, and it is only when so considered that any opinions of his can be duly estimated. Their essentially moderate character, too, is unfavourable to them—not, indeed, among careful inquirers,

but in the hubbub of public controversy. The only great party which has as yet attacked Sir Robert Peel's Bill is that which desires an extensive issue of inconvertible currency; but to them Mr. Wilson was as much opposed as Sir Robert Peel himself. The two watchwords of the controversy are "caution" and "expansion": the advocates of the Act of 1844 have seized on the former, the Birmingham school on the latter; the intermediate, and, as we think, juster, opinions of Mr. Wilson have had no party cry to aid them, and they have not as yet therefore obtained the practical influence which he never ceased to anticipate and to hope for them. No more need be said upon the currency question—perhaps we have already said too much; but to those who knew Mr. Wilson well, no subject is more connected with his memory: he was so fond of expounding it, that its very technicalities are, in the minds of some, associated with his voice and image.

But it was not by mere correctness of economical speculation that Mr. Wilson was to rise to eminence. A very accurate knowledge of even the more practical aspects of economical science is not of itself a productive source of income. By the foundation of the *Economist* Mr. Wilson secured for himself, during the rest of his life, competence and comfort, but it was not solely or simply by writing good political economy in it. The organisation of a first-rate commercial paper in 1843 required a great inventiveness and also a great discretion. Nothing of the kind then existed; it was not known what the public most wished to know on business interests; the best shape of communicating information had to be invented in detail. The labour of creating such a paper, and of administering it during its early stages is very great; and might well deter most men even of superior ability from attempting it. At this period of his life Mr. Wilson used to superintend the whole of the *Economist;* to write all the important leaders, nearly all of the unimportant ones; to make himself master of every commercial question as it arose; to give practical details as to the practical aspects of it; to be on the watch for every kind of new commercial information; to spend hours in adapting it to the daily wants of commercial men. He often worked till

far into the morning, and impressed all about him with wonder at the anxiety, labour, and exhaustion he was able to undergo. As has been stated, for some months after the commencement of the *Economist* he was still engaged in his former business; and after he relinquished that, he used to write the City article and also leaders for the *Morning Chronicle*, at the very time that he was doing on his own paper far more than most men would have had endurance of mind or strength of body for. Long afterwards he used to speak of this period as far more exhausting than the most exhausting part of a laborious public life. "Our public men," he once said, "do not know what anxiety means; they have never known what it is to have their own position dependent on their own exertions." In 1843, and for some time afterwards, he had himself to bear extreme labour and great anxiety together; and even his iron frame was worn and tired by the conjunction.

Within seven years from the foundation of the *Economist*, Mr. Wilson dealt effectively and thoroughly with three first-rate subjects—the railway mania, the famine in Ireland, and the panic of 1847, in addition to the entire question of Free-trade, which was naturally the main topic of economical teaching in those years. On all these three topics he explained somewhat original opinions, which were novelties, if not paradoxes then, though they are very generally believed now. To his writings on the railway mania he was especially fond of recurring, since he believed that by his warnings, very effectively brought out and very constantly reiterated, he had "saved several men their fortunes" at that time.

The success of the *Economist*, and the advantage which the proprietor of it would derive from a first-hand acquaintance with political life, naturally led him to think of gaining a seat in Parliament, and an accidental conversation at Lord Radnor's table fixed his attention on the borough of Westbury. After receiving a requisition, he visited the place, explained his political sentiments at much length "from an old cart," and believed that he saw sufficient chances of success to induce him to take a house there. He showed considerable abilities in electioneering, and a close observer once said of him, "Mr

Wilson may, or may not, be the best political economist in England, but depend upon it he is the *only* political economist who would ever come in for the borough of Westbury". Though nominally a borough, the constituency is half a rural one, much under the influence of certain Conservative squires. The Liberal party were in 1847 only endeavouring to emancipate themselves from a yoke to which they have now again succumbed. Except for Mr. Wilson's constant watchfulness, his animated geniality, his residence on the spot, his knowledge of every voter by sight, the Liberal party might never have been successful there. A certain expansive frankness of manner and a wonderful lucidity in explaining his opinions almost to any one, gave Mr. Wilson great advantages as a popular candidate; and it was very remarkable to find these qualities connected with a strong taste for treating very dry subjects upon professedly abstract principles. So peculiar a combination had the success which it merited. In the summer of 1847 he was elected to serve in Parliament for Westbury.

Mr. Wilson made his first speech in the House of Commons[1] on the motion for a Committee to inquire into the commercial distress at that time prevalent. And it was considered an act of intellectual boldness for a new member to explain his opinions on so difficult a subject as the currency, especially as they were definitely opposed to a measure supported by such overwhelming Parliamentary authority as the Act of 1844 then was. Judging from the report in "Hansard," and from the recollections of some who heard it, the speech was a successful one. It is very clear and distinct, and its tone is very emphatic, without ever ceasing to be considerate and candid. It contains a sufficient account of Mr. Wilson's tenets on the currency—so good an account, indeed, that when he read it ten years later, in the panic of 1857, he acknowledged that he did not think he could add a word to it. At the time, however, the test of its Parliamentary success was not the absolute correctness of its abstract principles, but, to use appropriate and technical language, "its getting a rise out of Peel". Sir Robert had used some certainly inconclusive arguments in

[1] On 30th November, 1847.

favour of his favourite measure, and Mr. Wilson made that inconclusiveness so very clear that he thought it necessary to rise "and explain," which, on such a subject, was deemed at the moment a great triumph for a first speech.

As might be expected from so favourable a commencement, Mr. Wilson soon established a Parliamentary reputation. He was not a formal orator, and did not profess to be so. But he had great powers of exposition, singular command of telling details upon his own subjects, a very pleasing voice, a grave but by no means inanimate manner—qualities which are amply sufficient to gain the respectful attention of the House of Commons. And Mr. Wilson did gain it. But speaking is but half, and in the great majority of cases by far the smaller half, of the duties of a member of Parliament. Mr. Wilson was fond of quoting a saying of Sir R. Peel's, "That the way to get on in the House of Commons was to take a place and sit there". He adopted this rule himself, was constant in his attendance at the House, a good listener to other men, and always ready to take trouble with troublesome matters. These plain and business-like qualities, added to his acknowledged ability and admitted acquaintance with a large class of subjects upon which knowledge is rare, gave Mr. Wilson a substantial influence in the House of Commons in an unusually short time. The Corn-laws had been repealed, the pitched battle of Free-trade had been fought and won, but much yet remained to be done in carrying out its principles with effective precision, in applying them to articles other than corn, in exposing the fallacies still abundantly current, and in answering the exceptional case which every trade in succession set up for an exceptional protection. These were painful and complex matters of detail, wearisome to very many persons, and rewarding with no *éclat* those who took the trouble to master and explain them. But Mr. Wilson shrank from no detail. For several years before he had a seat in the House, he had been used to explain such topics in countless conversations with the most prominent Free-traders and in the *Economist*. He now did so in the House of Commons, and his influence correspondingly increased. He was able to do an important work better than any one else

could do it; and, in English public life, real work rightly done at the right season scarcely ever fails to meet with a real reward.

That Mr. Wilson early acquired considerable Parliamentary reputation is evinced by the best of all proofs. He was offered office before he had been six months in the House of Commons, though he had, as the preceding sketch will have made evident, no aristocratic connections—though he was believed to be a poorer man than he really was—though writing political articles for newspapers has never been in England the sure introduction to political power which it formerly was in France—though, on the contrary, it has in general been found a hindrance. In a case like Mr. Wilson's, the prize of office was a sure proof of evident prowess in the Parliamentary arena.

The office which was offered to Mr. Wilson was one of the Secretaryships of the Board of Control. Mr. Wilson related at Hawick his reluctance to accept it, and his reason. Never having given any special attention to Indian topics, he thought it would be absurd and ridiculous in him to accept an office which seemed to require much special knowledge. But Lord John Russell, with "that knowledge of public affairs which long experience ensures," at once explained to him that a statesman, under our Parliamentary system, must be prepared to serve the Queen "whenever he may be called on"; and accordingly that he must be ready to take any office which he can fill, without at all considering whether it is that which he can best fill. After some deliberation, Mr. Wilson acknowledged the wisdom of this advice, and accepted the office offered him. Long afterwards, in the speech at Hawick to which we have alluded, he said that without the preliminary knowledge of India which he acquired at the Board of Control, he should never have been able to undertake the regulation of her finances.

When once installed in his office, he devoted himself to it with his usual unwearied industry. And at least on one occasion he had to deal with a congenial topic. The introduction of railways into India was opposed on many grounds, most of which are now forgotten—such as "the effect upon the native

mind," "the impossibility of inducing the Hindoos to travel in that manner," and the like; and more serious difficulties occurred in considering the exact position which the Government should assume with regard to such great undertakings in such singular circumstances—the necessity, on the one hand, in an Asiatic country where the State is the sole motive power, of the Government's doing something—and the danger, on the other hand, of interfering with private enterprise, by its doing, or attempting to do, too much. Mr. Wilson applied himself vigorously to all these difficulties; he exercised the whole of his personal influence, and the whole of that which was given to him by his situation, in dissipating the fanciful obstacles which were alleged to be latent in the unknown tendencies of the Oriental mind; while he certainly elaborated —and he believed that he originally suggested—the peculiar form of State guarantee upon the faith of which so many millions of English capital have been sent to develop the industry of India.

Besides discharging the duties of his office, Mr. Wilson represented the Government of the day on several Committees connected with his peculiar topics, and especially on one which fully investigated the Sugar question. Of the latter, indeed, he became so fully master that some people fancied he must have been in the trade; so complete was the familiarity which he displayed with "brown muscovado," "white clayed," and all other technical terms which are generally inscrutably puzzling to Parliamentary statesmen. On a Parliamentary Committee Mr. Wilson appeared to great advantage. Though sufficiently confident of the truth of his own opinions, he had essentially a fair mind; he always had the greatest confidence that if the facts were probed the correctness of what he believed would be established, and, *therefore*, he was always ready to probe the facts to the bottom. He was likewise a great master of the Socratic art of inquiry; he was able to frame a series of consecutive questions which gradually brought an unwilling or a hostile witness to conclusions at which he by no means wished to arrive. His examination-in-chief, too, was as good as his cross-examination, and the animated interest

which he evinced in the subject relieved the dreariness which a rehearsed extraction of premeditated answers commonly involves. The examination of Lord Overstone before the Committee of 1848 on Commercial Distress, that of Mr. Weguelin before the Committee on the Bank Acts in 1857, and several of the examinations before the Committee on Life Insurance, of which he was the Chairman, may be consulted as models in their respective kinds. And it should be stated that no man could be less overbearing in examination or cross-examination; much was often extracted from a witness which he did not wish to state, but it was always extracted fairly, quietly, and by seeming inevitable sequence.

Mr. Wilson continued at the Board of Control till the resignation of Lord John Russell's Cabinet in the spring of 1852. He took part in the opposition of the Liberal party to Lord Derby's Government, and was very deeply interested in the final settlement of the Free-trade question which was effected by the accession of the Protectionist party to office. After a very severe contest he was re-elected for Westbury in July, 1852, and on the formation of the Aberdeen Government he accepted the office of Financial Secretary to the Treasury, which he continued to hold for five years, until the dissolution of Lord Palmerston's administration in the spring of 1857, and upon his efficiency in which his remarkable reputation as an official administrator was mainly based.

The Financial Secretaryship of the Treasury is by no means one of the most conspicuous offices in the Government, and but few persons who have not observed political life closely are at all aware either of its difficulty or of its importance. The office is, indeed, a curious example of the half-grotesque way in which the abstract theory of our historical Constitution contrasts with its practical working. In the theory of the Constitution—a theory which may still be found in popular compendiums—there is an officer called the Lord High Treasurer, who is to advise the Crown and be responsible to the country for all public moneys. In practice, there is no such functionary: by law his office is "in commission". Certain Lords Commissioners are supposed to form a Board

at which financial subjects are discussed, and which is responsible for their due administration. In practice, there is no such discussion and no such responsibility. The functions of the Junior Lords of the Treasury, though not entirely nominal, are but slight. The practical administration of our expenditure is vested in the First Lord of the Treasury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Financial Secretary of the Treasury. And of these three the constitutional rule is, that the First Lord of the Treasury is only officially responsible for decisions in detail when he chooses to interfere in those decisions. Accordingly, when a First Lord, as was the case with Sir R. Peel, takes a great interest in financial questions, the Chancellor of the Exchequer does the usual work of the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of the Treasury has in comparison nothing to do. But when, as was the case in the Governments of Lord Aberdeen and Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister takes no special interest in finance, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is very fully employed in the transaction of his own proper business, and an enormous mass of work, some of it of extreme importance, falls to the Secretary of the Treasury. Of late years, the growth of the miscellaneous civil expenditure of the country has greatly augmented that work, great as it was before. In general, it may be said that the whole of the financial detail of our national expenditure is more or less controlled by the Secretary of the Treasury; that much of it is very closely controlled by him; and that he has vast powers of practical discretion, if only he be a man of ability, industry and courage.

For such an office as this Mr. Wilson had very peculiar qualifications. He was perfectly sure to be right in a plain case; and by far the larger part of the ordinary business of the Government, as of individuals, consists of plain cases. A man who is thoroughly sure to decide effectually and correctly the entire mass of easy, obvious cases, is a safer master of practical life than one eminently skilled in difficult cases, but deficient in the more rudimentary qualification. Nor is the power of certainly deciding plain cases rightly, by any means very common, especially among very intellectual men. A cer-

tain taint of subtlety, a certain tendency to be wise above the case in hand, mars the practical efficiency of many men whose conversation and whose powers would induce us to expect that they would be very efficient. Mr. Wilson had not a particle of these defects. He struck off each case with a certain sledge-hammer efficiency, and every plain case at least with infallible accuracy.

It might seem overstrained eulogy—a eulogy which he would not have wished—to claim for Mr. Wilson an equally infallible power of deciding complicated cases. As to such cases there will always be a doubt. Plain matters speak for themselves: they do not require a dissertation to elucidate them: every man of business, as soon as he hears the right decision of them, knows that it is the right decision. But with more refined matters it is not so; as to points involving an abstract theory, like that of the currency, there will and must be differences of judgment to the end of time. We would not, therefore, whatever may be our own opinion, claim for Mr. Wilson as infallible a power of deciding difficult questions as he certainly possessed of deciding plain questions. But we do claim for him even in such matters the greatest secondary excellence, if indeed, a secondary excellence it be. Mr. Wilson was perfectly certain to be *intelligible on the most difficult case.* Whether he did right or did wrong, must, as we have said, be from the nature of the subject-matter very arguable. But *what* he did, and *why* he did it, was never in doubt for a moment. The archives of the Treasury contain countless minutes from his pen, many of them written with what most men would call rapidity, just while the matter was waiting for decision, and on all sorts of subjects, many of them very complicated ones—yet it may be doubted whether any one of those minutes contains a single sentence not thoroughly and conspicuously clear. The same excellence which has been shown in countless articles in the *Economist* appears in his business-like documents. Wherever his leading articles were written and under whatever circumstances—and some of the most elaborate of them were written under rather strange circumstances (for he could catch up a pen and begin to write on

the most involved topic, at any time, in any place, and as a casual observer would think, without any premeditation)—but wherever and however these articles might be written, it may be safely asserted that they do not contain a sentence which a man of business need read twice over, or which he would not find easily and certainly intelligible. At the Treasury it was the same. However complicated and involved the matter to be decided might be—however much it might be loaded with detail or perplexed by previous controversy—Mr. Wilson never failed to make immediately clear the exact opinion he formed upon it, the exact grounds upon which he formed it, and the exact course of action which he thought should be adopted upon it. Many persons well acquainted with practical life will be disposed to doubt whether extreme accuracy of decision is not almost a secondary merit as compared with a perfect intelligibility. In many cases it may be better to have a decision which every one can understand, though with some percentage of error, than an elaborately accurate decision of which the grounds and reasons are not easily grasped, and a plan of action which, from its refined complexity, is an inevitable mystery to the greater number of practical persons. But, putting aside this abstract discussion, we say without fear of contradiction or of doubt, that Mr. Wilson added to his almost infallible power of deciding plain cases, an infallible certainty of being entirely intelligible in complicated cases. Men of business will be able to imagine the administrative capacity certain to be produced by the union of extreme excellence in both qualities.

One subsidiary faculty that Mr. Wilson possessed, which was very useful to him in the multifarious business of the Treasury, was an extraordinary memory. On his own subjects and upon transactions in which he had taken a decisive part, he seemed to recollect anything and everything. He was able to answer questions as to business transacted at the Treasury after the lapse of months and even of years without referring to the papers, and with a perfect certainty of substantial accuracy. He would say, without the slightest effort and without the slightest idea that he was doing anything extraordinary: "Such and such a person came to me at the

Treasury, and said so and so, and this is what I said to him". And it is quite possible that he might remember the precise sums of money which were the subject of conversation. A more useful memory for the purpose of life was perhaps never possessed by any one. In the case of great literary memories, such as that of Lord Macaulay and of others, the fortunate possessor has a continued source of pleasurable and constantly recurring recollections; he has a full mind constantly occupied with its own contents, recurring to its long-loved passages from its favourite authors constantly and habitually. But Mr. Wilson never recurred to the transactions in which he had been engaged except when he was asked about them; he lived as little in the past perhaps as is possible for an intellectual person; but the moment the spring was touched by a question or by some external necessity, all the details of the past transaction started into his memory completely, vividly, and perfectly. He had thus the advantage of always remembering his business, and also the advantage of never being burdened by it. Very few persons can ever have had in equal measure the two merits of a fresh judgment and a full mind.

Mr. Wilson's memory was likewise assisted by a very even judgment. It was easier to him to remember what he had done, because, if he had to do the same thing again, he would be sure to do it in precisely the same way. He was not an intolerant person, but the qualities he tolerated least easily were flightiness and inconsistency of purpose. He had furnished his mind, so to say, with fixed principles, and he hated the notion of a mind which was unfurnished.

All these mental qualities taken together go far to make up the complete idea of a perfect administrator of miscellaneous financial business, such as that of the English Treasury now is. And Mr. Wilson had the physical qualities also. An iron constitution which feared no labour, and was very rarely incapacitated even for an hour by any illness, enabled him to accomplish with ease and unconsciously an amount of work which few men would not have shrunk from. In the country, where his habits were necessarily more obvious, he habitually spent the whole day from eleven till eight, with some slight interval for a short

ride in the middle of the day, over his Treasury bag; and as such was his notion of a holiday, it may be easily conceived that in London, when he had still more to do in a morning, and had to spend almost every evening in the House of Commons, his work was greater than an ordinary constitution could have borne. And it was work of a rather peculiar kind. Some men of routine habits spend many hours over their work, but do not labour very intensely at one time; other men of more excitable natures work impulsively, and clear off everything they do by eager efforts in a short time. But Mr. Wilson in some sense did both. Although his hours of labour were so very protracted, yet if a casual observer happened to enter his library at any moment, he would find him with his blind down to exclude all objects of external interest, his brow working eagerly, his eye fixed intently on the figures before him, and, very likely, his rapid pen passing fluently over the paper. He had all the labour of the chronic worker, and all the labour of the impulsive worker too. And those admitted to his intimacy used to wonder that he was never tired. He came out of his library in an evening more ready for vigorous conversation—more alive to all subjects of daily interest—more quick to gain new information—more ready to expound complicated topics, than others who had only passed an easy day of idleness or ordinary exertion.

By the aid of this varied combination of powers, Mr. Wilson was able to grapple with the miscellaneous financial business of the country with very unusual efficiency. Most men would have found the office work of the Secretary of the Treasury quite enough, but he was always ready rather to take away labour and responsibilities from other departments than to throw off any upon them. Nor was his efficiency confined to the labours of his office. The Financial Secretary of the Treasury has a large part of the financial business of the House of Commons under his control, and is responsible for its accurate arrangement. The passing a measure through the House of Commons is a matter of detail; and in the case of the financial measures of the Government, a large part of this—the dullest part, and the most unenvied—falls to the Secretary of the

Treasury. He is expected to be the right hand of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in all the most wearisome part of the financial business of the House of Commons; and we have the best authority for stating that, under two Chancellors of the Exchequer, very different from one another in many respects, Mr. Wilson performed this part of his duties with singular efficiency, zeal, and judgment.

The Financial Secretary of the Treasury is likewise expected to answer all questions asked in the House as to the civil estimates—a most miscellaneous collection of figures, as any one may satisfy himself by glancing at them. Mr. Wilson's astonishing memory and great power of lucid exposition enabled him to fulfil this part of his duty with very remarkable efficiency. He gave the dates and the figures without any note, and his exposition was uniformly simple, emphatic, and intelligible, even on the most complicated subjects. The great rule, he used to say, was to answer exactly the exact question; if you attempted an elaborate exposition, collateral issues were necessarily raised, a debate ensued, and the time of the House was lost.

Mr. Wilson's mercantile knowledge and mercantile sympathies were found to be of much use in the consolidation of the Customs in 1853, and he took great interest in settling a scheme for the payment of the duties in cheques instead of bank-notes, by which the circulation has been largely economised and traders greatly benefited. During the autumn of 1857, his long study of the currency question, and his first-hand conversancy with the business of the City, were valuable aids to the Administration of the day in the anxious responsibilities and rapidly shifting scenes of an extreme commercial crisis. It would be impossible to notice the number of measures in which he took part as Secretary of the Treasury, and equally impossible to trace his precise share in them. That office ensures to its holder substantial power, but can rarely give him legislative fame.

On two occasions during his tenure of office at the Treasury, Mr. Wilson was offered a different post. In the autumn of 1856 he was offered the Chairmanship of Inland Revenue, a per-

manent office of considerable value then vacant, which he declined because he did not consider the income necessary, and because (what some people would think odd) it did not afford sufficient occupation. It was a "good pillow," he said, "but he did not wish to lie down". The other office offered him was the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade in 1855, which would have been a step to him in official rank, but which would have entailed a new election, and he did not feel quite secure that the electors of Westbury would again return him. He did not, however, by any means wish for the change, as the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade, though nominally superior, is in real power far inferior to the Secretaryship of the Treasury.

In the general election of 1857, Mr. Wilson was returned for Devonport, for which place he continued to sit till his departure for India. He went out of office on the dissolution of Lord Palmerston's Administration in the spring of 1858, and took an active part in the Liberal opposition to Lord Derby's Government, though it may be remarked that he carefully abstained from using the opportunities afforded him by his long experience at the Treasury, of harassing his less experienced successors in financial office by needless and petty difficulties.

On the return of the Liberal party to power, Mr. Wilson was asked to resume his post at the Treasury, but he declined, as, after five years of laborious service, he wished to have an office of which the details were less absorbing. He accepted, however, the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade[1]—an office which is not in itself attractive, but which gives its possessor a sort of claim to be President of the Board at the next vacancy. The office of President is frequently accompanied by a seat in the Cabinet, and Mr. Wilson's reputation on all subjects connected with trade was so firmly established that in his case it would have been practically impossible to pass him over, even if it had been wished. He had, however, secured so firm a position in official circles by his real efficiency, that the dispensers of patronage were, as he believed, likely to give him whatever he desired as soon as the exigencies of party enabled them to do so.

[1] He was at the same time made a Privy-Councillor.

He had not been long in office before he had good reason for thinking that he would be offered by the Government the office of Financial Member of the Council of India under very peculiar circumstances. There had never before been such an officer. One member of Council had since 1833 been always sent out from England, but he had always been a lawyer, and his functions were those of a jurist and a regulative administrator, not those of a financier. The mutiny of the Sepoys in 1857 had, however, left behind it a deficit with which the financiers of India did not *seem* to be able to cope, and which a cumbrous financial system did not give them the best means of vanquishing. There was a general impression that some one with an English training and English habits of business would have a better chance of overcoming the most pressing difficulty of India than any one on the spot. And there was an equally general impression that if any one were to be sent from England to India with such an object, Mr. Wilson was the right person. He united high financial reputation, considerable knowledge of India acquired at the Board of Control, tried habits of business, long experience at the English Treasury, to the sagacious readiness in dealing with new situations which self-made men commonly have, but which is commonly wanting in others.

On personal grounds Mr. Wilson was disinclined to accept the office. He was on the threshold of the Cabinet here; he was entitled by his long tenure of office at the Treasury to a pension which would merge in the salary of Indian Councillor; the emoluments of the latter office were not necessary to him; his life was very heavily insured for the benefit of his family; though he had never during his tenure of office at the Treasury been connected directly or indirectly with any kind of commercial undertaking (the *Economist* alone excepted), some investments which he made in land and securities, entirely beyond the range of politics, had been very fortunate; since the year 1844 everything of a pecuniary kind in which he had been concerned had not only prospered, but remarkably prospered; he felt himself sufficiently rich to pursue the career of prosperous usefulness and satisfied ambition that seemed to be

before him here. There was no consideration of private interest which could induce him to undertake anxious and dangerous duties in India; he even ran some pecuniary risk in leaving this country, as it was possible that in the vicissitudes of newspaper property the *Economist* might again need the attention of its proprietor and founder. On public grounds, however, he believed that it was his duty to accept the office; he took a keen interest in Indian finance; believed that the difficulties of it might be conquered, and thought that in even *attempting* to conquer them he would be doing the greatest and most lasting public service that it was in *his* power to accomplish.

He accordingly accepted the office of Financial Member of the Council of India, and proceeded to make somewhat melancholy arrangements for leaving this country. He broke up his establishment here, bade farewell to his constituents at Devonport and to the inhabitants of his native place, attended some influential public meetings in towns deeply interested in the commerce of India, and on 20th October, 1859, left England, as it proved, for ever.

Of Mr. Wilson's policy in India it would not be proper to give more than a very brief sketch here. That policy is still fresh in the memory of the public; it has been very frequently explained and discussed in the *Economist;* it is still being tried; and, though he was fully persuaded of the expediency of his measures, he would not have wished for too warm a eulogy of them while they are as yet untested by the event. In almost the last letter which the present writer received from him, there was a sort of reprimand for permitting this journal to draw too great an attention to his plans, and to ascribe the merit of them too exclusively to him, and too little to the Government of which he was a member.

On his arrival in India he found that the Governor-General was on a tour in the Upper Provinces of India, and before doing any business of importance at Calcutta he travelled thither. This journey he thought very advantageous, because it gave him a great insight into the nature of the country, and enabled him to consult the most experienced revenue officers

of many large districts on their respective resources, and on the safest mode of making those resources available to the public. He was much struck with the capabilities of the country, and wrote to England in almost so many words "that it was a fine country to *tax*". On the other hand, however, he was well aware of the difficulty of his task. The only two possible modes of taxation are direct and indirect, and in the case of India there is a difficulty in adopting either. If we select indirect taxation and impose duties on consumable commodities, the natives of India meet us by declining to consume. Their wants are few, and they will forego most of them if a tax can be evaded thereby. On the other hand, if we adopt in India a direct tax on property or income, there is great difficulty in finding out what each man's property or income is. In England we trust each person to tell us the amount of his income, but even here the results are not wholly satisfactory; and it would be absurd to fancy that we can place as much reliance upon the veracity of Orientals as upon that of Englishmen.

These difficulties, however, Mr. Wilson was prepared to meet. On 18th February, 1860, he proposed his Budget to the Legislative Council at Calcutta, and the reception given to it by all classes was remarkably favourable. He announced, indeed, a scheme of heavy taxation, but the Indian public had been living for a considerable time under a sentence of indefinite taxation, and they were glad to know the worst. Anything distinct was better than vague suspense, and, as usual, Mr. Wilson contrived to make his meaning *very* distinct. His bearing also exercised a great influence over the Anglo-Indian public. In England he had been remarkable among official men for his constant animation and thorough naturalness of manner; in his office he was as much himself as at a dinner-table or in the House of Commons; he had no tinge of supercilious politeness or artificial blandness. In any new scene of action—especially in such a scene as British India—these qualities were sure to tell beneficially. Plain directness and emphatic simplicity were the external qualities most likely to be useful at Calcutta, and these were Mr. Wilson's most remarkable qualities.

The principal feature of Mr. Wilson's Budget was the Income Tax, which he avowedly framed after the English fashion. It is true that but little reliance can, perhaps, be placed on the statements of Orientals as to their wealth. It is very possible that the complicated machinery of forms and notices which is in use here may not be applicable in India. All this Mr. Wilson well knew. But he thought that our Indian subjects should have an opportunity of stating their income before they were taxed upon it. If they should state it untruly, or should decline to state it, it might be necessary to tax them arbitrarily. But he did not think it would be decent—that it would be civilised—to begin with an arbitrary assessment. By the Income Tax Act which he framed, it is enacted that other modes may be substituted if in any instance the English mode of assessment should prove inapplicable. In other words, if our Oriental fellow-subjects will not tell us the truth when they are asked, we must tax them as best we can, and they cannot justly complain of unfairness and inequality. *We* would have been mathematically just, if *they* had given us the means.

The reception of Mr. Wilson's Budget was universally favourable until the publication of the minute of Sir C. Trevelyan, which, as was inevitable, produced a serious reaction. Heavy taxation can never be very pleasant, and in the Presidency of Madras Sir Charles gave the sanction of the Government—of the highest authority the people saw—to the hope that they would not be taxed. The prompt recall of Sir Charles, however, did much to convince the natives of the firm determination of the English Government, and Mr. Wilson hoped that the ordeal of criticism through which his measures had to pass would ultimately be favourable to them. It certainly secured them from the accusation of being prepared in haste, but it purchased this benefit at the loss to the public of much precious time, and to Mr. Wilson of precious health. Of the substance of this minute it is sufficient to say that its fundamental theory that additional taxation of any sort was unnecessary in India, has scarcely been believed by

any one except its author. Almost every one has deemed it too satisfactory to be true.

On another point Mr. Wilson's Budget had been criticised in England, though not in India. It has been considered to be a protective Budget. The mistake has arisen from not attending to what that Budget is. The changes made by Mr. Wilson in the import duties were two. "The first was a reduction from twenty to ten per cent. upon a long list of articles, including haberdashery, millinery, and hosiery, all part of the cotton trade; the second was an increase in the duty upon cotton yarn from five to ten per cent., thus creating a uniform tariff of ten per cent."[1] Of these two, it is plain the reduction from twenty per cent. to ten was not a change that would operate as a protection to Indian industry; and the increase of the duty on yarn has a contrary tendency. Yarn is an earlier, cloth a later, stage of manufacture, and in Mr. Wilson's own words, "it is a low duty on yarn and a high duty on cloth that encourages native weaving". For the effect of the general system of high Customs duties in India Mr. Wilson is not responsible, but his predecessors. What *he* did has no protective tendency.

If the Income Tax should, as may be fairly hoped, become a permanent part of the financial system of India, it will serve for a considerable period to keep Mr. Wilson's name alive there. So efficient an expedient must always attract the notice of the public, and must in some degree preserve the remembrance of the Minister by whom it was proposed. Mr. Wilson, however, undertook two other measures of very great importance. One of these has been frequently described as the introduction into India of the English system of public accounts. But it would be more truly described as the introduction of a rational system of public accounts. There are three natural steps in national finance, which are certainly clearly marked in our English system, but which have a necessary existence independent of that recognition. These three are — first, the estimate of future expenditure; secondly, what we call the Budget, that is, the official calculation of the income by which

[1] *Economist* of 8th Sept., 1860, p. 977.

the coming expenditure is to be defrayed; thirdly, the audit, which shows what the expenditure has been and how it has been met. The system of finance which Mr. Wilson found in India neglected these fundamental distinctions. There were no satisfactory estimates of future expenditure, and no satisfactory calculation of future income. In consequence, the calculations of the official departments have been wrong by millions sterling, and English statesmen have felt great difficulty not only in saying how the deficit was to be removed, but likewise in ascertaining what the amount of the deficit was. At the time of his death Mr. Wilson was eagerly occupied in endeavouring to introduce a better system.[1]

Mr. Wilson will likewise be remembered as the first Minister who endeavoured to introduce into India a Government paper currency. On 3rd March, 1860, he introduced into the Legislative Council an elaborate plan for this purpose, which, with a slight modification by Sir C. Wood—curious in the theory of the currency, but practically not very important —will speedily, it is probable, be the fundamental currency law—the "Peel's Act" of British India.

The exact mode in which Mr. Wilson regarded these great objects, will perhaps be better explained by two extracts from his latest letters than by any other means. On 4th July, he wrote to a friend:—

"Firmness and justice are the only policy for India: no vacillation, or you are gone. They like to be governed; and respect an iron hand, if it be but equal and just. I have, I think, more confidence than ever that the taxes will be established and collected, and without disturbance. But the task is still an enormous one. I must retrench yet at least three and a half millions, and get the same sum from my new taxes to make both ends meet. I am putting the screw on very strongly, but rather by an improved policy in army and police than in reductions of salaries and establishments, which cannot be made. I have set myself *five* great points of policy to introduce and carry out:—

"1. To extend a system of sound taxation to the great trading classes, who hitherto have been exempted, though chiefly benefited by our enormously increased civil expenditure.

"2. To establish a paper currency.

[1] His measures were adopted and are still in use to the great advantage of the finance system of India. (ED.)

"3. To reform and remodel our financial system by a plan of annual budgets and estimates, with a Pay Department to check issues, and keep them within the authorised limits,—and an effective audit.

"4. A great police system of semi-military organisation, but usually of purely civil application, which, dear though it be, will be cheaper by half a million than our present wretched and expensive system,—and by which we shall be able to reduce our native army to at least one-third;—and by which alone we can utilise the natives as an arm of defence without the danger of congregating idle organised masses.

"5. Public works and roads, with a view to increased production of cotton, flax, wool, and European raw materials.

"The four first I have made great progress in: the latter must follow. But you will call it 'a large order'. However, you have no idea of the increased capacity of the mind for undertaking a special service of this kind when removed to a new scene of action, and when one throws off all the cares of engagements less or more trivial by which one is surrounded in ordinary life, and throws one's whole soul into such a special service, and particularly when one feels assured of having the power to carry it out, I cannot tell you with what ease one determines the largest and gravest question here compared with in England; and I am certain that the more one can exercise real power, there is by far the greater tendency to moderation, care, and prudence."

In a second letter, dated 19th July, he wrote to the same friend from Barrackpore:—

"The Indian Exchequer is a huge machine. The English Treasury is nothing to it for complexity, diversity, and remoteness of the points of action. Our great enemies are time and distance; and with all our frontier territories there is scarcely a day passes that we have not an account of some row or inroad. It is a most unwieldy Empire to be governed on the principle of forcing civilisation at every point of it. One day it is the Frontier of Scinde and a quarrel with our native chiefs, which our Resident must check; another it is an intrigue between Herat and Cabul, with a report of Russian forces in the background; the next there is a raid upon our Punjab frontiers to be chastised; then come some accounts of coolness, or misunderstanding, or unreasonable demands from our ally in Nepaul; then follow some inroads from the savage tribes which inhabit the mountains to the rear of Assam and up the Burrampootra; then we have reported brawls in Burmah and Pegu, and disputes among the hill tribes whose relations to the British and the Burmah Governments are ill defined; then we have Central India, with our loyal chiefs Scindiah and Holkar, independent princes with most turbulent populations, which could not be kept in order a day without the presence of British troops and of the Governor-General's Agent. Besides all these, we have among ourselves a thousand questions of internal administration,

rendered more difficult by the ill-defined relations between the Supreme and the Subordinate Governments—the latter always striving to encroach, the former to hold its own. Hence, questions do not come before us simply on their merits, but often as involving these doubtful rights. Then we have Courts of Justice to reform, as well as all other institutions of a domestic kind not to reform alone, but to extend to new territories. Then we have a deficit of £7,000,000, and had a Government teaching the people that all could be done without new taxes. But unfortunately all, except the taxes, are a present certainty—*they* are a future contingency. What will they yield? I have no precise knowledge. I think from three to four millions a year when in full bloom: this financial year not more than a million.

"I have now got a Military Finance Commission in full swing; a Civil Finance Commission also going: I am reorganising the Finance, Pay, and Accountant-General's Department, in order to get all the advantage of the English system of estimates, Pay Office, and Audit: and this with as little disturbance of existing plans as possible. The latter is a point I have especially aimed at. On the whole, and almost without an exception, I have willing allies in all the existing Offices. No attempt that I see is anywhere made to thwart or impede.

"You can well understand, then, how full my hands are, if to all these you add the new currency arrangements; you will not then wonder that my health has rendered it necessary to come down here for a day or two to get some fresh air."

It will be observed that in the last extract Mr. Wilson alludes to his impaired health. For some time after his arrival in India he seemed scarcely to feel the climate. He certainly did not feel it as much as might have been anticipated. He worked extremely hard; scarcely wrote a private letter, but devoted the whole of his great energies to the business around him. His letters for a considerable time abound with such expressions as "Notwithstanding all my hard work, my health is excellent". From the commencement of the rainy season at Calcutta, however, he ceased to be equally well, his state began to arouse the apprehensions of experienced observers, and he was warned that he should retire for a short time to a better climate. He would not, however, do so until his financial measures had advanced sufficiently far for him to leave them. His position was a very peculiar one. In general, if one administrator leaves his post, another is found to fill it up. But Mr. Wilson was a unique man at Calcutta. He was sent there because he had certain special qualifications which no one

there possessed; and, accordingly, he had no one to rely on in his peculiar functions save himself. His presence on the spot was likewise very important. The administration of a department can be frequently transacted by letter, but the organisation of new departments and new schemes requires the unremitting attention of the organiser—the impulse of his energy. The interest, too, which Mr. Wilson took in public business was exceptionally great, and no one who knew him well would suppose that *he* would leave Calcutta while necessary work, or what he deemed so, was to be done there.

Nor was labour the sole trial to which his constitution was exposed. The success of measures so extensive as his, must ever be a matter of anxious doubt until the event decides; and in his case there were some momentary considerations to aggravate that anxiety. There was no experience of such taxation as he had proposed, and the effect of it must therefore be difficult to foresee. Moreover, for a brief period, a famine seemed to be imminent in Upper India, which must have disturbed the whole operation of his financial schemes. In his debilitated state of health this last source of anxiety seemed much to weigh upon him.

About the middle of July he went for a week to Barrackpore, near Calcutta. The change was, however, too slight, and, as might be expected, he returned to Calcutta without any material benefit. From that time the disease gradually augmented, and on the evening of 2nd August, he went to bed never to rise from it again. For many days he continued to be very ill, and his family experienced the usual alternations of hope and fear. He was quite aware of his critical state, and made all necessary arrangements with his habitual deliberation and calmness.

Lord Canning saw him on the 9th for the last time, and was much struck with the change which illness had made in him. He believed that he saw death in his face, and was deeply impressed with the vivid interest which, even in the last stage of weakness, he took in public affairs, with his keen desire for the success of his plans, and with the little merit which he was disposed to claim for his own share in them.

It was hoped that he would be strong enough to bear removal, and it was intended to delay the mail steamer for a few hours to take him to sea—the usual remedy at Calcutta for diseases of the climate. But when the time came there was no chance that his strength would be adequate to the effort. During the whole of the 11th he sank rapidly, and at half-past six in the evening he breathed his last.

The mourning at Calcutta was more universal than had ever been remembered. He had not been long in India, but while he had been there he filled a conspicuous and great part; he had done so much, that there were necessarily doubts in the minds of some as to the expediency of part of it. No such doubts, however, were thought of now. "That he should have come out to die here!"—"That he should have left a great English career *for this!*"—were the phrases in every one's mouth. The funeral was the largest ever known at Calcutta. It was attended by almost the entire population, from the Governor-General downwards, and not a single voice, on any ground whatever, dissented from the general grief.

Very little now remains to be said. A few scattered details, some of them perhaps trivial, must complete this sketch.

Mr. Wilson's face was striking, though not handsome. His features were irregular, but had a peculiar look of mind and energy, while a strongly marked brow and very large eyebrows gave to all who saw him an unfailing impression of massive power and firm determination.

Mr. Wilson's moral character in its general features resembled his intellectual. He was not a man of elaborate scruples and difficult doubts, and he did not much like those who were. His conscientiousness was of a plain, but very practical kind; he had a single-minded rectitude which went straight to the pith of a moral difficulty—which showed him what he ought to do. On such subjects he was somewhat intolerant of speculative reasoning. "The common-sense is so and so," he used to say, and he did not wish to be plagued with anything else. In one respect his manner did not uniformly give a true impression of him. He always succeeded in conveying his meaning, in stating what he wished to have

done and why he wished it; he never failed to convince any one of his inexhaustible vigour and his substantial ability; but he sometimes did fail in giving a true expression to his latent generosity and real kindliness. He shrank almost nervously from the display of feeling, and sometimes was thought by casual observers to feel nothing, when in reality he was much more sensitive than they were. Another peculiarity which few persons would have attributed to him aided this mistake. It may seem strange in a practised Secretary of the Treasury, but he used to say that through life he had suffered far more from shyness than from anything else. Only very close observers could have discovered this, for his manner was habitually impressive and unfaltering. But common acquaintances, sometimes even persons who saw him on business, erroneously imputed to unthinking curtness, that which was due in truth to nervous hesitation.

With his subordinates in office he was, however, very cordial. He discussed matters of business with them, listened carefully to their suggestions or objections, and very frequently was guided by their recommendations. He had no paltry desire to monopolise the whole credit of what might be done. He probably worked harder than any Secretary of the Treasury before or since; but so far from depressing those below him, he encouraged their exertions, co-operated with them, and was ever ready to bear hearty testimony to the tried merit of efficient public servants. He was also quite willing to forget the temporary misunderstandings which are so apt to occur among earnest men who take different views of public affairs. He was eminently tolerant. Though he had almost always a strong conviction of his own, he never felt the least wish to silence discussion. Believing that his own opinions were true, he was only the more confident that the more the subject was discussed, the more true they would be found to be. Few men ever transacted so much important business with so little of the pettiness of personal feeling.

In the foregoing sketch Mr. Wilson has of necessity been regarded almost exclusively as a public man, but his private life has many remarkable features, if it were proper to enlarge

on them. His enjoyment of simple pleasures, of society, of scenery, of his home, was very vivid. No one who saw him in his unemployed moments would have believed that he was one of the busiest public men of his time. He never looked worn or jaded, and always contributed more than his share of geniality and vivacity to the scene around him. Like Sir Walter Scott, he loved a bright light; and the pleasantest society to him was that of the cheerful and the young.

The universal regret which has been expressed at Mr. Wilson's death is the best tribute to his memory. It has been universally felt that on his special subjects and for his peculiar usefulness he was "a finished man," and in these respects he has left few such behind him. The qualities which he had the opportunity of displaying were those of an administrator and a financier. But some of those who knew him best, believed that he only wanted an adequate opportunity to show that he had also many of the higher qualities of a statesman; and it was the feeling that he would perhaps have such an opportunity which reconciled them to his departure for India. As will have been evident from this narrative, he was placed in many changing circumstances, and in the gradual ascent of life was tried by many increasing difficulties. But at every step his mind grew with the occasion. We at least believe that he had a great sagacity and a great equanimity, which might have been fitly exercised on the very greatest affairs. But it was not so to be.

The intelligence of Mr. Wilson's death was formally communicated by the Indian to the Home Government in the following despatch:—

"To the Right Honourable Sir Charles Wood, Bart., G.C.B., Secretary of State for India.

"SIR,—The painful task is imposed upon us of announcing to Her Majesty's Government the death of our colleague, the Right Honourable James Wilson.

"2. This lamentable event took place on the evening of Saturday, the 11th, after an illness of a few days.

"3. We enclose a copy of the notification by which we yesterday communicated the mournful intelligence to the public. The funeral took place at the time mentioned in the notification; and the great respect

in which our lamented colleague was held was evinced by a very large attendance of the general community, in addition to the public officers, civil and military.

"4. We are unable adequately to express our sense of the great loss which the public interests have sustained in Mr. Wilson's death. We do not doubt, however, that this will be as fully appreciated by Her Majesty's Government, as it is by ourselves, and as we have every reason to believe it will be by the community generally throughout India.

"5. But we should not satisfy our feelings in communicating this sad occurrence to Her Majesty's Government, if we did not state our belief that the fatal disease which has removed Mr. Wilson from amongst us was in a great degree the consequence of his laborious application to the duties of his high position, and of his conscientious determination not to cease from the prosecution of the important measures of which he had charge, until their success was ensured. Actuated by a self-denying devotion to the objects for which he came out to this country, Mr. Wilson continued to labour indefatigably long after the general state of his health had become such as to cause anxiety to the physician who attended him, and it was within a few days only after the Income Tax had become law, and when, at the earnest request of his medical adviser, he was preparing to remove from Calcutta for the remainder of the rainy season, that he was seized with the illness that has carried him off.

"6. It is our sincere conviction that this eminent public servant sacrificed his life in the discharge of his duty. We have, etc.,

"CANNING.
"H. B. E. FRERE.
"C. BEADON.

"FORT WILLIAM, 13*th August*."

THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION AT THE PRESENT CRISIS.

CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR IN AMERICA.

BY J. LOTHROP MOTLEY MANWARING.

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IT is not at first easy for an ordinary Englishman to appreciate adequately the favourite arguments which the most cultivated and best American writers use at the present juncture. It seems to him that they are arguments befitting lawyers, not arguments befitting statesmen. They appear only to prove that a certain written document, called the Constitution of the United States, expressly forbids the conduct which the Southern States are consistently pursuing, and that therefore such conduct is culpable as well as illegal. Very few Englishmen will deny either the premiss or the conclusion considered in themselves. It is certain that the Constitution does forbid what the slave States are doing; it is equally certain, that their policy is as mean, as unjustifiable, and every way as discreditable, as was ever pursued by any public bodies equally powerful and equally cultivated. But nevertheless an argument from the mere letter of a written Constitution will hardly convince any Englishman. He knows that all written documents must be very meagre; that the best of them must often be unsatisfactory; that most of them contain many errors; that the best of them are remarkable for strange omissions; that all of them will fail utterly when applied to a state of things different from any which its authors ever imagined. The complexity of politics is thoroughly comprehended by every Englishman—the complexity of our history has engraved it on our mind; the complexity of our

polity is a daily memento of it—and no one in England will be much impressed by any arguments which tacitly assume that the limited clauses of an old State-paper can provide for all coming cases, and for ever regulate the future.

It is worth while, however, to examine the American Constitution at the present juncture. No remarkable aspect of the great events which are occurring among our nearest national kindred and our most important trading connexions in our own times, can be wisely neglected; and it will be easy to show that the Constitution of the United States is now failing from the necessary consequence of an inherent ineradicable defect; that more than one of its thoughtful framers perceived that it must fail under similar circumstances; and that the irremediable results of this latent defect have been aggravated partly by the corruptions which the Constitution has contracted in the progress of time, and yet more by certain elaborate provisions which were believed to be the best attainable safeguards against analogous dangers and difficulties.

Like most of the great products of the Anglo-Saxon race, the American Constitution was the result of a pressing necessity, and was a compromise between two extreme plans for meeting that necessity. It was framed in a time of gloom and confusion. The "revolted colonies," as Englishmen then called them, had been successful in their revolt; but they had been successful in nothing else. They had thrown off the yoke of the English Government; but they had founded no efficient or solid government of their own. They had been united by a temporary common sentiment—by a common antipathy to the interference of the mother country; but the binding efficacy of that feeling ceased when their independence of the mother country had been definitely recognised. Nor was there any other strong bond of union which could supply its place. The American colonies had been founded by very different kinds of persons, at very different periods of English history. They had respectively taken the impress of the class of Englishmen who had framed them: Virginia had the mark of the aristocratic class; Massachusetts of the Puritan;

Pennsylvania of the Quakers. The modern colonies of England are of a single type; they are founded by a single class, from a single motive. Those who now leave England are, with some exceptions, but still for the most part and as a rule, a rough and energetic race, who feel that they cannot earn as much money as they wish in England, and who hope and believe that they will be able to earn that money elsewhere. They are driven from home by the want of a satisfactory subsistence, and that subsistence is all they care or seek to find elsewhere. To every other class but this, England is too pleasant a residence for them to dream of leaving it for the antipodes. With our early colonies it was otherwise. When they were founded, England was a very unpleasant place for very many people. As long as the now-balanced structure of our composite society was in the process of formation, one class obtained a temporary ascendency at one time, and another class at another time. At each period they made England an uncomfortable place of residence for all who did not coincide in their notions of politics, and who would not subscribe to their tenets of religion. At such periods the dissident class threw off a swarm to settle in America; and thus our old colonies were first formed.

No one can be surprised that communities with such a beginning should have acquired strong antipathies to one another. Even at the present day, the antipathy of the inhabitants of South Carolina to the people of Boston, the dislike of Kentuckians to New Yorkers, has surprised attentive observers. But when their independence was first recognised, such feelings were infinitely more intense. The original founders of the colonies had hated one another at home. Those colonies were near neighbours in a rude country, and the occasional collision of petty interests had kept alive the original antipathy of each class to its antagonistic class, of each sect to its antagonistic sect. M. de Tocqueville remarked, that even in his time there was no national patriotism in America, but only a State patriotism; and though, in 1833, this remark was perhaps exaggerated, it would have been, fifty years before, only the literal expression of an indisputable fact.

The name "American" had scarcely as yet any political signification—it was a "geographical expression".

Grave practical difficulties of detail, too, oppressed the new community. The war with England had been commenced by a body calling itself a Congress, but very different from the elaborate and composite body which we now know by that name. It was a simple committee of delegates from the different States, which could recommend to those States whatever military measures it thought advisable, but had no greater power or function whatever. It was in no sense a government. It had no coercive jurisdiction, could compel nothing, and enforce nothing. It was an advising council, which had no resources of its own, and could only rely on its dignified position, and the obvious necessity of united opposition to the common enemy. But, as might be anticipated, so frail an organisation was entirely inadequate to the rough purposes of revolutionary warfare. It could not meet a pressing difficulty; and it did not meet it. It worked well when it was not wanted—when all the States were unanimous; but it was insufficient when the States began to disagree—at the very moment for which it was required.

The responsible leaders of the revolutionary struggle felt the necessity of a closer bond; and in March, 1781, nearly five years after the Declaration of Independence, the first real American Government was formed. It was called the Confederation, and was very simple in its structure. There was no complicated apparatus of President and Vice-president, such as we are now familiar with; no Supreme Court, no house of Representatives. The Confederation rather resembled what existed previously than what exists at present. There was, as before, a committee of delegates from the different States, and there was nothing else: this was the whole government; but this was not as before, simply a committee with powers of recommendation. It could by its own authority make peace and war, establish armies, contract debts, coin money, issue a paper currency, and send ambassadors to foreign nations. It could in theory, and according to its letter, perform all the ordinary acts and functions of sovereignty. It

did, in fact, perform the greatest act of sovereignty, as a lawyer would reckon it, that could be conceived. By signing a peace with England, it secured its own existence. Being a loose aggregate of revolted colonies, it obtained a recognition by the mother country against which these colonies had revolted. In the face of Europe, and in the face of England more especially, it maintained the appearance of an organised, regular, and adequate government.

It really was, however, very inadequate. Some one has said that the true way to test the practical operation of any constitution is to ask, "How do you get money under it?" This is certainly an American mode of testing a polity, and according to this criterion the "perpetual Confederation" was an egregious failure. "You could not get dollars by means of it at all." The national Congress could incur liabilities, but it could not impose taxation. It could, as we have explained, raise an army, contract a debt, issue a credit currency; but it could not of itself, and by its own authority, levy a penny. The States had retained in their own hands the exclusive power of imposing taxes. Congress could only require the several States to find certain quotas of money, and in the event of their not finding them could go to war with them. As a theorist would anticipate, the simplest alternative happened. The States did not find the money, and the Congress did not go to war with them. The debts of the Union were undischarged; the soldiers, even the French soldiers, who had achieved its independence, were unpaid; and the financial conditions of the Treaty of Independence with England were unfulfilled. Congress could do nothing, and the States would do nothing. Other smaller difficulties, too, were accumulating. The large unoccupied territory of the American continent required care; England was irritated at the non-completion or the infraction of several of the articles of peace; petty quarrels between the States on vexing minutiae were constantly beginning, and were rarely ending. The impotence of Congress was becoming proverbial, and the entire country was discouraged. In the correspondence of Washington and those around him it is evident that they asked themselves with

doubt and despondency, "After all, will America be a nation?"

Two schemes floated in the public mind for remedying these evils. It was the opinion of some of the wisest American statesmen, and especially of Hamilton, the greatest political philosopher among them, that it would be better to establish an omnipotent Federal Government, which should be to America what the English Government was to England, which should have the full legislative, the full executive, the full judicial power which a sovereign government possesses in ordinary States.[1]

[1] As Hamilton's plan is not easily accessible in this country, and may have some interest at the present moment, when some persons, at least, are desirous of attempting a similar experiment, we give it at length.

"The following paper was read by Col. Hamilton, as containing his ideas of a suitable plan of Government for the United States.

"1. The supreme legislative power of the United States of America to be vested in two distinct bodies of men, the one to be called the assembly, the other the senate, who, together, shall form the legislature of the United States, with power to pass all laws whatsoever, subject to the negative hereafter mentioned.

"2. The assembly to consist of persons elected by the people, to serve for three years.

"3. The senate to consist of persons elected to serve during good behaviour; their election to be made by electors chosen for that purpose by the people. In order to do this, the States to be divided into election districts. On the death, removal, or resignation of any senator, his place to be filled out of the district from which he came.

"4. The supreme executive authority of the United States to be vested in a governor, to be elected to serve during good behaviour. His election to be made by electors chosen by electors, chosen by the people, in the election districts aforesaid. His authorities and functions to be as follows:—

"To have a negative upon all laws about to be passed, and the execution of all laws passed; to have the entire direction of war, when authorised, or begun; to have, with the advice and approbation of the senate, the power of making all treaties; to have the sole appointment of the heads or chief officers of the departments of finance, war, and foreign affairs; to have the nomination of all other officers (ambassadors to foreign nations included) subject to the approbation or rejection of the senate; to have the power of pardoning all offences, except treason, which he shall not pardon without the approbation of the senate.

Hamilton proposed that the "supreme legislative power of the United States should be vested in two distinct bodies of men," who should have power to pass all laws whatever, subject to a veto in a governor or first magistrate. For the choice of the members of these bodies, he would have divided the country into electoral districts, and no State as such would have elected a single representative to the united legislature, or have been capable of any function or voice in the Constitution of the Union. "All laws of the particular States contrary to the Constitution of the Union or laws of the United States were to be utterly void." And "the better to prevent

"5. On the death, resignation, or removal of the governor, his authorities to be exercised by the president of the senate, until a successor be appointed.

"6. The senate to have the sole power of declaring war; the power of advising and approving all treaties; the power of approving or rejecting all appointments of officers, except the heads or chiefs of the departments of finance, war, and foreign affairs.

"7. The supreme judicial authority of the United States to be vested in judges, to hold their offices during good behaviour, with adequate and permanent salaries. This court to have original jurisdiction in all causes of capture, and an appellative jurisdiction in all causes in which the revenues of the general government, or the citizens of foreign nations, are concerned.

"8. The legislature of the United States to have power to institute courts in each State, for the determination of all matters of general concern.

"9. The governors, senators, and all officers of the United States to be liable to impeachment for mal and corrupt conduct; and, upon conviction, to be removed from office, and disqualified from holding any place of trust or profit. All impeachments to be tried by a court to consist of the chief, or senior judge of the superior court of law in each State; provided that such judge hold his place during good behaviour, and have a permanent salary.

"10. All laws of the particular States contrary to the constitution or laws of the United States to be utterly void. And the better to prevent such laws being passed, the governor or president of each State shall be appointed by the general government, and shall have a negative upon the laws about to be passed in the State of which he is governor, or president.

"11. No State to have any forces, land or naval; and the militia of all the States to be under the sole and exclusive direction of the United States; the officers of which to be appointed and commissioned by them."

such laws being passed, the governor or president of each State" was to be appointed by the general Government, was to have a negative upon all laws "about to be passed therein". No State was to have any forces, land or naval; and the militia of all the States were to be under the exclusive direction of the general Government of the United States, which alone was to appoint and commission their officers. In practice this scheme would have reduced the existing States to the condition of mere municipalities; they would have retained extensive powers of interior regulation, but they would have lost all the higher functions of government, all control over any matters not exclusively their own; they would have continued to be, so to say, County Boards for county matters, but they would have had no share in the sovereign direction of general affairs. They would have been as restricted, as isolated as the Corporations of Liverpool and Bristol are under the Constitution of England.

A theorist would perhaps be inclined to regret that some such plan as that of Hamilton was not eventually chosen. At the present moment political speculators in England are singularly inclined to schemes of political unity. The striking example of Italy has given a natural stimulus to them. We have seen a great nation which had long been divided combine into what, we hope, will be a permanent State at the bidding of a few able and active men, and, as it seems to the many, by a kind of political enchantment. The change, when regarded from a distance, has appeared so easy, that we underrate its real difficulties, and are inclined to erect one of the most exceptional events in history into an ordinary precedent and example. But the state of America eighty years since may easily show us why such events have been rare in history; why locality has been called an instinct in the human mind; why large States have almost always been produced by the constraining vigour of some single conquering power. Each of the States of North America was a little commonwealth, with a vigorous political life. Each one of them had its ministry, its opposition, its elections, its local questions; each had its own political atmosphere, each its peculiar ambitions.

Even if the different States had been well disposed to one another, it would have been difficult to induce all of them—especially to induce the smaller among them—to give up this local political animation. The Italian States seem to have relinquished it; but, in truth, they had little to relinquish. They were despotically governed. None of them had within their own boundaries that vast accumulation of ideas and sentiments and hopes, of love and hatred, which we call a "political life". The best men in Tuscany were not sacrificing a cherished career or an accustomed existence in favouring the expulsion of the Grand Duke; for so long as he remained they had no influence. After his expulsion the question of national unity or of local division could be considered fairly and impartially. It was not so in America: there were in every one of the States men who must have relinquished evident power, attainable proximate ambition—the dearest of ambitions, the power of governing the persons whom they had known all their lives, and with whom they had all their lives been in actual political competition—for the sake of an unknown "general government"; which was an abstraction which could have excited no living attachment, in which but a very few could take a prominent or gratifying share. Nor, as we have explained, were the different States mutually well disposed. The differences of their origin still embittered, and long seemed likely to embitter, the local squabbles of years. The saying of the Swiss Antifederalist, "My shirt is dearer to me than my coat!" was the animating spirit of nine-tenths of North America. The little State of Delaware refused even to consider the abolition of the fifth article of the Confederation, which preserved the separate existence and the primitive equality of the separate States by enacting that each should have one vote only. The plan of Hamilton could not be carried, and he was too wise a statesman to regard it as much better than a tempting dream.

The second extreme suggestion for amending the "perpetual Confederation" would have been equivalent in practice to a continuance of that Confederation very much as it was.

Its theoretical letter proposed indeed to give additional powers to the Central Congress, but the States were to be still the component elements in the Constitution. The Congress was still to have no other power than that of requiring from these States what money it needed. It would still be compelled to declare war against them if that money was in arrear. It would still have been in the condition graphically delineated by a contemporary statesman: "By this political compact the United States in Congress have exclusive power for the following purposes without being able to execute one of them. They may make and conclude treaties; but can only recommend the observance of them. They may appoint ambassadors; but cannot defray even the expenses of their tables. They may borrow money in their own name on the faith of the Union; but cannot pay a dollar. They may coin money; but they cannot purchase an ounce of bullion. They may make war, and determine what number of troops are necessary, but cannot raise a single soldier. In short, they may declare everything, but do nothing." Thus the second suggestion for remedying the pressing evils of America was as inefficient as the first had been impracticable.

The selected Constitution was a mean between the two. As the State Governments could not be abolished, and could not be entirely divested of their sovereign rights, a new Government was created, superior to them in certain specified matters, and having independent means of action with reference to those matters, but in all other things leaving their previous functions unrestricted, and their actual authority unimpaired. By the active Constitution the central Congress has the right of imposing certain specified revenues, and the power of collecting them throughout each State by officers of its exclusive appointment. It has, as under the Confederation, the power of making peace and proclaiming war—of engaging soldiers and contracting debts; but it now has likewise a power of collecting a revenue to remunerate those soldiers, and to pay those debts by its own authority, and without the consent of any subordinate body. It has not now to require obedience from the States in their corporate capacity, but to

compel the obedience of individuals throughout those States in their natural isolation, and according to the ordinary custom of Governments.

We can now understand the answer of an American architect who was asked the difference between a Federation and Union. "Why," he said, "a Federation is a Union with a top to it." There is, in the United States, not simply an assemblage of individual sovereign States, but also a super-sovereign State, which has its officers side by side with theirs, its revenue side by side with theirs, its law-courts side by side with theirs, its authority on a limited number of enumerated points superior even to theirs. No political invention has been more praised than this one. It has been truly described as the most valuable addition to the resources of political philosophy ever made by professed constitution-makers. Greater things have grown up among great nations; studious thinkers have speculated on better devices; but nothing so remarkable was perhaps ever struck out on the impulse of the moment by persons actually charged with the practical duty of making a Constitution. American writers are naturally proud of it; and it would be easy to collect from European writers of eminence an imposing series of encomiums upon its excellence.

Yet now that we have before us the pointed illustration of recent events, it is not difficult to see that such an institution is only adapted to circumstances exceptionally favourable, and that under a very probable train of circumstances it must fail from inherent defect. It is essentially a collection of *imperia in imperio.* It rather displays than conceals the grave disadvantages which have made that name so very unpopular. Each State is a subordinate Republic, and yet the entire Union is but a single Republic. Each State is in some sense a centre of disunion. Each State attracts to itself a share of political attachment, has separate interests, real or supposed, has a separate set of public men anxious to increase its importance —upon which their own depends,—anxious to weaken the power of the United Government, by which theirs is overshadowed. At every critical period the sinister influence of

the *imperium in imperio* will be felt; at every such period the cry of each subordinate aggregate will be, "Our interests are threatened, our authority diminished, our rights attacked".

A presidential election is the very event of all others to excite these dangerous sentiments. It places the entire policy of the Union upon a single hazard. A particular moment is selected when the ruler for a term of years is to be chosen. That ruler has very substantial power of various kinds; he has immense patronage, a legislative veto, great executive authority, and, what is yet more to the present purpose, he has a supreme position in society, which indefinitely attracts his popular choice, and indefinitely aggravates the intensity of the canvass. A homogeneous and simple State, with no subordinate rivals within its frontiers, might well fear to encounter such a struggle. What, then, must be the certain result in a Federal Union whenever a large minority of the States should consider their rights and their interests to be identified with the election or with the rejection of any one presidential candidate? What can we anticipate when the greatest dividing force, the overt choice of a supreme ruler, after canvass and struggle and controversy, is applied to the most separable of political communities,—to a disjointed aggregate of States, whose local importance has been legally fostered, whose separate existence has been heedfully cherished, whose political vitality is older and more powerful than the bond of constitutional union? Surely, according to every canon of probability, we must confidently anticipate a separation whenever the sinister interest of a large and unconquerable section of the States shall be attacked, or be conceived to be attacked, by the selection of a supreme head for the whole nation. Independently of matters of detail, independently of the actual power which every supreme magistrate possesses, it is too much to expect that a considerable number of vigorous and active communities will, if they can help it, be governed by a person who is the symbol of the doctrine that they must hate and fear, and who is just elected by their special foes precisely because he is that symbol.

More than one of the most discerning of the framers of the

American Constitution seems not only to have perceived the inherent defects of the work in which he had participated, but to have had a prevision of the real source from which ultimate danger was to be foreboded. Most of the controversies in the Convention which framed the Constitution had turned, in several forms, on the various consequences of the very different magnitude of the States which were about to join. The large States were anxious to be strong; the small States were fearful of being weak. But Mr. Madison, one of the most judicious men of that time, clearly perceived that, though this was naturally the principal difficulty in securing the voluntary adoption by the several States of any proposed Constitution, it would not be an equally menacing danger to the continuance of the Union when that Constitution was once established. The small States shrank from binding themselves to a Union, exactly because they felt that they must remain in it if they entered. If they once contracted to combine with stronger countries, the superior power of those countries would enforce an adherence to the bargain. The really formidable danger which threatened the American Union was the possibility of a difference of opinion between classes of States of which no one was immeasurably stronger than the other. This Madison saw. He observed:—

"I would always exclude inconsistent principles in framing a system of government. The difficulty of getting its defects amended are great, and sometimes insurmountable. The Virginia State government was the first which was made, and though its defects are evident to every person, we cannot get it amended. The Dutch have made four several attempts to amend their system without success. The few alterations made in it were by tumult and faction, and for the worse. If there was real danger, I would give the smaller States the defensive weapons; but there is none from that quarter. The great danger to our general government is the great Southern and Northern interests of the continent being opposed to each other. Look to the votes in Congress, and most of them stand divided by the geography of the country, not according to the size of the States."

It was not, indeed, very difficult for the eye of a practised politician to discern the great diversity between the Northern and Southern societies. It was even then conspicuous to the eye of the least gifted observer. An accomplished French writer, whose essay was written before the perceptions of all of us were sharpened by recent events, has thus described it: "Au Sud, le sol appartenait à de grands propriétaires entourés d'esclaves et de petits cultivateurs. Les substitutions et le droit d'aînesse perpétuaient les richesses et le pouvoir dans une aristocratie qui occupait presque toutes les fonctions publiques. Le culte anglican était celui de l'État. La société et l'Église étaient constituées d'une façon hiérarchique. Au Nord, au contraire, l'esprit d'égalité dans la société comme dans l'Église: 'Je crains beaucoup les effets de cette diversité de moeurs et d'institutions,' écrivait John Adams à Joseph Hawley, le 25 novembre 1775; 'elle deviendra fatale si de part et d'autre on ne met beaucoup de prudence, de tolérance, de condescendance. Des changements dans les constitutions du Sud seront nécessaires si la guerre continue; ils pourront seuls rapprocher toutes les parties du continent.'" Probably, however, no one in those times anticipated the rapidity with which those differences would develop, for no one apprehended the practical working of slavery. Many persons unquestionably understood the immediate benefit with which it buys an insidious admission into uncultivated countries; but perhaps no one understood at how great price of ultimate evil that benefit would probably be purchased. No one could be expected to perceive that both the temporary benefit and the ultimate disadvantages resembled one another in being opposed to the continuance of the newly-formed Union; for even at the present day, and after a very painful experience, it is not steadily perceived by all of us.

Slavery is the one institution which effectually counteracts the assimilative force to which all new countries are subject,—that force which makes all men alike there, and which stamps upon the communities themselves so many common features. In such countries men are struggling with the wilderness; they are in daily conflict with the rough powers of nature, and

from them they acquire a hardness and a roughness somewhat like their own. They cannot cultivate the luxuries of leisure, for they have no leisure. They must be mending their fences, or cooking their victuals, or mending their clothes. They cannot be expected to excel in the graces of refinement, for these require fastidious meditation and access to great examples, and neither of these are possible to hard-worked men at the end of the earth. A certain democracy in such circumstances rises like a natural growth of the soil. An even equality in mind and manners, if not in political institutions, is inevitably forced upon those whose character is pressed upon by the same rude forces, who have substantially the same difficulties, who lead in all material points the same life. All are struggling with the primitive difficulties of uncivilised existence, and all are retarded by that struggle at the same low level of instruction and refinement.

Slavery breaks this dead level, and it is the only available device that does so. The owner of a few slaves, partly employed in the service of his house and partly in the cultivation of his land, has a good deal of leisure, and is not exposed to any very brutalising temptation. It is his interest to treat his slaves well, and in ordinary circumstances he does treat them well. They give him the means of refinement, and the opportunities of culture: they receive from him good clothing, a protective surveillance, and some little moral improvement. Washington was such a slave-owner, and it is probable that at Mount Vernon what may be called the temptation of slavery presented itself in its strongest and most attractive form. At all events, it is certain that, by the irresistible influence of superior leisure and superior culture, the Virginian slave-owner acquired a singular pre-eminence in the revolutionary struggle, moved the bitter jealousy of all his contemporaries, and bestowed an indefinite benefit upon posterity. But even this beneficial effect of slavery, momentary as it was, was not beneficial to the Union as such: it did not strengthen, but weakened the uniting bond; it introduced an element of difference between State and State, which stimulated bitter envy, and suggested constant division. In the correspondence of

the first race of Northern statesmen, a dangerous jealousy of the superior political abilities of the South is frequently to be traced.

The immense price, however, which has been paid for the short-lived benefit of slavery has been immeasurably more dangerous to the Union than the benefit itself. As we all perceive, it is tearing it in two. In the progress of time slave-owning becomes an investment of mercantile capital, and slaves are regarded, not as personal dependents, but as impersonal things. The necessities of modern manufacture require an immense production of raw material, and in certain circumstances slaves can be beneficially employed on a large scale to raise that material. The evils of slavery are developed at once. The owner of a few slaves whom he sees every day will commonly treat them kindly enough; but the owner of several gangs, on several different plantations, has no similar motive. His good feelings are not much appealed to in their favour; he does not know them by name, he does not know them by sight; they are to him instruments of production, which he bought at such and such a price, which cost so many dollars, which must be made to yield so many dollars. He is often brutalised by working them cruelly; he is still oftener brutalised in other ways by the infinite temptations which a large mass of subject men and subject women inevitably offer to tyranny and to lust. Nor in such a state of society does slavery monopolise the charm which at first attracted men to it. When large capitals have been accumulated, there will be without it sufficient opportunities for moderate leisure and for reasonable refinement. Slavery buys its admission with the attractions of Mount Vernon; it develops its awful consequences in lonely plantations on the banks of the Mississippi, whose owner wants cotton, and wants only cotton; where he himself, or some manager whom he pays, employs himself in brutalities to black men, and enjoys himself in brutalities to black women. The events of this year exhibit the result. The probable disunion of the South and the North is but the inevitable consequence of the existing moral contrast. It is not possible to retain in voluntary combination such a community

as Massachusetts and communities whose ruling element is such a slavery as that we have described.

We see, therefore, from this brief survey, that we have no cause to wonder even at the almost magical consequences of Mr. Lincoln's election. It was the sort of event which was most likely to produce such consequences. A Republic of United States which put up the first magistracy to periodical popular election, was most likely to part asunder when fundamental contrasts in character, ideas, and habits had long been growing rapidly between two very large classes of States, and when one of these classes persisted in electing to the first place in the Republic the very person who embodied the aim and tendencies most odious to the other class. It is evident, too, that the Northern and Southern States cannot hope to continue united under the present Constitution, or to form parts of the same Federal Republic under any Constitution whatever. No free State can rule an unwilling dependency of large size, except by excluding that dependency from all share in its own freedom. If Ireland unanimously wished to withdraw from the government of England, we could not rule it without excluding its representatives from Parliament. We know what the Irish members are now: we know that they are not very convenient; we know that they seem invented to give trouble, but who can imagine a House of Commons in which one hundred eager Irish members were united by a consistent intention to make an English Government impossible? who can imagine the Parliamentary consequences of so great a voting power, used not for the purposes of construction, but exclusively for those of destruction? who can suppose that during a series of years we could keep any firm administration at all with so powerful a force ever ready to combine with every one who desired to pull down, and never ready to combine with any one who wished to set up? Yet this is a faint example of what the American Congress would be with a regularly organised Southern opposition retained within the Union by force, but desirous to leave it, anxious to destroy it; never voting for any thing except with this object; never voting against anything save on that account.

And such would be the inevitable result of the victory of the North. The Southern States are sure to preserve an intense local feeling for many years. History shows that they have always had it; the occupations and the habits of such bodies insure their having it. Even if the North were to conquer them now, their whole political force for many years would unquestionably be devoted to the attainment of disunion. Who can doubt that they would eventually obtain it by rendering all government impossible upon any lesser conditions? A free union is essentially voluntary. Sir Creswell Creswell may decree the restitution of matrimonial rights; but even he would not venture to decree the enforcement on an unwilling State of a promise to combine with another into a Parliamentary union.

Some of the framers of the American Constitution, as we have seen, foresaw its principal danger, and they did all which they could to provide against it. They erected a Supreme Court, a pre-eminent judicial tribunal, which is empowered to decide causes between State and State, and between any State and the Federal Government. And on many small, and on some important, matters, this Court has worked very well; it has given able if not always satisfactory, judgments on various points of State controversy; it has provided a tolerably fair umpire, and has thus prevented many small *quæstiunculæ* from growing into grave questions. It was excellent upon minor points; it has been useless upon the greatest. When, as recently, great passions have been aroused, great interests at stake, great issues clearly drawn out, a reference to the Supreme Court has not even been contemplated. No judicial establishment could, indeed, be useful in an extra-judicial matter; no law decide what is beyond the competence of law; no supplementary provision, however ingenious, cure the essential and inseparable defects of a Federal Union.

The steadily augmenting power of the lower orders in America has naturally augmented the dangers of their Federal Union. In almost all the States there was, at the time the Constitution of the Union was originally framed, a property qualification, in some States a high one, requisite for the pos-

session of the most popular form of suffrage. Almost all these qualifications have now been swept away, and a dead level of universal suffrage runs, more or less, over the whole length of the United States. The external consequences, as we all know, have not been beneficial: the foreign policy of the Union has been a perplexing difficulty to European nations, and especially to England, for many years. Nor have the internal consequences been better. The most enthusiastic advocates of a democratic government will admit that it is both an impulsive and a contentious government. Its special characteristic is, that it places the entire control over the political action of the whole State in the hands of the common labourers, who are of all classes the least instructed—of all the most aggressive—of all the most likely to be influenced by local animosity—of all the most likely to exaggerate every momentary sentiment—of all the least likely to be capable of a considerable toleration for the constant oppositions of opinion, the not unfrequent differences of interests, and the occasional unreasonableness of other States. In democracies, local feuds are commonly more lasting and more bitter than in States of other kinds; and those enmities commonly become more bitter in proportion to the greater nearness of relation, the greater closeness of political connexion, and the greater contrast of disposition, temper, and internal circumstances. What intensity of bitterness was then to be anticipated in a so-called Union, in which two distinct sets of democracies—the Southern and the Northern, the slaveholding and the non-slaveholding—have been for many years augmenting in contrast to, and increasing in antipathy to, one another! The existing crisis is only the natural consequence, the inevitable development, of a long antagonism between these two species of Republics, in both of which the most intolerant members are absolute rulers, and each of which presented characteristics which the hidden instincts of the other, even more than its conscious opinion, regarded first as irritating and then as dangerous. The progress of democracy has affected not only the State Government, but the Federal Government. The House of Representatives in the latter is

elected by the same persons who choose the most popular branch of the legislature in the former. As the State Governments have become more democratic, the Federal Government has inevitably become more so likewise. To this gradual corruption of the American democracy it is principally owing that Europe at large, and England especially, have not grieved much at the close proximity of its probable fall, but perhaps rejoiced at the prospect of some marked change from a policy which was so inconvenient to its neighbours, which must be attended to because its range was so wide, and the physical force under its direction was so large, but of which the events were mean, the actors base, and the working inexplicable. A low vulgarity, indefinable but undeniable, has deeply displeased the cultivated mind of Europe; and the American Union will fall, if it does fall, little regretted even by those whose race is akin, whose language is identical, whose weightiest opinions are on most subjects the same as theirs. The unpleasantness of mob government has never before been exemplified so conspicuously, for it never before has worked upon so large a scene.

These latter truths are very familiar. The evils of democracy and the dangers of democracy are great commonplaces in our speculation, though also formidable perils in our practice. But it is not commonplace to observe, that the existing crisis in America has been intensified almost as much by the precautions which the original founders of the Constitution took to ward off what they well knew to be the characteristic evils of democracy, as by those evils themselves. We have been so much accustomed to hear the "United States" extolled as the special land of democratic liberty, to hear their Constitution praised as the unmixed embodiment of uncontrolled popular power, that we have forgotten how many restrictive provisions that Constitution contains, and how anxiously its framers endeavoured to provide against the special defects of a purely popular polity.

It is not too much to say that a valuable addition to the accumulations of Conservative oratory might be extracted from the debates of the Convention which framed the American re-

volution. The two objects which its most intelligent framers were mainly bent on attaining were, security against the momentary caprice of a purely numerical majority, and some effective provision for the maintenance of a strong executive. What would Mr. Bright say to the following speech of Mr. Morris, not by any means the most conservative member of the Convention?—

"The two branches, so equally poised, cannot have their due weight. It is confessed, on all hands, that the second branch ought to be a check on the first; for without its having this effect it is perfectly useless. The first branch, originating from the people, will ever be subject to precipitancy, changeability, and excess. Experience evinces the truth of this remark, without having recourse to reading. This can only be checked by ability and virtue in the second branch. On your present system, can you suppose that one branch will possess it more than the other? The second branch ought to be composed of men of great and established property—an aristocracy; men who from pride will support consistency and permanency; and to make them completely independent, they must be chosen for life, or they will be a useless body. Such an aristocratic body will keep down the turbulency of democracy. But if you elect them for a shorter period, they will be only a name, and we had better be without them. Thus constituted, I hope they will show us the weight of aristocracy.

"History proves, I admit, that the men of large property will uniformly endeavour to establish tyranny. How, then, shall we ward off this evil? Give them the second branch, and you secure their weight for the public good. They become responsible for their conduct, and this lust of power will ever be checked by the democratic branch, and thus form a stability in your Government. But if we continue changing our measures by the breath of democracy, who will confide in our engagements? who will trust us? Ask any person whether he reposes any confidence in the Government of Congress, or that of the State of Pennsylvania; he will readily answer you, no. Ask him the reason; and he will tell you it is because he has no confidence in their stability.

"You intend also that the second branch shall be incapable of holding any office in the general Government. It is a dangerous expedient. They ought to have every inducement to be interested in your Government. Deprive them of this right, and they will become inattentive to your welfare. The wealthy will ever exist; and you never can be safe unless you gratify them as a body, in the pursuit of honour and profit. Prevent them by positive institutions, and they will proceed in some left-handed way. A son may want a place—you mean to prevent him from promotion. They are not to be paid for their services—they will in some way pay themselves; nor is it in your power to prevent it. It is good policy that men of property be collected in one body, to give them one common influence in your Government. Let vacancies be filled up, as they happen, by the executive. Besides it is of little consequence, on this plan, whether the States are equally represented or not. If the State Governments have the division of many of the loaves and fishes, and the General Government few, it cannot exist. This Senate would be one of the baubles of the general Government. If you choose them for seven years, whether chosen by the people or the States,—whether by equal suffrage or in any other proportion,—how will they be a check? They will still have local and State prejudices. A government by compact is no government at all. You may as well go back to your Congressional Federal Government, where, in the character of ambassadors, they may form treaties for each State. I avow myself the advocate of a strong Government."

This speech, striking as it is, is only a single specimen, and not, in several respects, the most striking of many which might be cited. The predominant feeling of the predominant party in the Convention is clearly expressed in the singularly complicated provisions of the Constitution which they framed. Almost every clause of it bears witness to the anxiety of its composers for an efficient executive, and for an adequate guard against momentary popular feeling.

Unfortunately they either had not at their disposal, or did not avail themselves of, the only effectual instruments for

either purpose. There is but one sufficient expedient against the tyranny of the lower orders, and that is to place the predominant (though not necessarily the exclusive) power in the hands of the higher orders. There must be some effectual sovereign authority in every government. In England, for example, the sovereign authority is the diffused respectable higher middle-class, which, on the whole, is predominant in the House of Commons, and in the Constituencies which return it. Whatever this class emphatically wills, is immediately enacted. It hears representations from the great mass of the orders which are below, it hears other and better expressed representations from the higher classes, which are above it. But it uses these only as materials by which to form a better judgment. If the House of Commons distinctly expresses an emphatic opinion, no other body or person or functionary hopes to oppose it, or dreams of doing so. Our security against tyranny is the reasonableness, the respectable cultivation, the business-like moderation of this governing class itself; if that class did not possess those qualities, the rest of the community would be always in danger, and very frequently be oppressed.

The framers of the American Constitution chose a very different expedient. They placed the predominant power in the hands of the numerical majority of the population, and hoped to restrain and balance it by paper checks and constitutional stratagems. At the present time, almost every one of their ingenious devices has aggravated the calamities of their descendants.

The mode in which the President of the United States is chosen is the most complicated which could well be imagined. A reader of the Constitution, uninformed as to the circumstances of its origin and the intentions of its framers, would imagine that complexity had sometimes been chosen as such, and for its own sake. Each, however, of these singular details was introduced with a very definite object.

"Each State," it is provided, "shall appoint, in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct, a number of electors equal to the whole number of senators and repre-

sentatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress; but no senator or representative, or person holding an office of trust or profit under the United States, shall be appointed an elector.

"The electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by ballot for two persons, of whom one at least shall not be an inhabitant of the same State with themselves. And they shall make a list of all the persons voted for, and of the number of votes for each: which list they shall sign and certify, and transmit, sealed, to the seat of the Government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate. The President of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates; and the votes shall then be counted. The person having the greatest number of votes shall be the President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of electors appointed; and if there be more than one who have such majority, and have an equal number of votes, then the House of Representatives shall immediately choose by ballot one of them for President; and if no person have a majority, then, from the five highest on the list, the said House shall in like manner choose the President. But in choosing the President the votes shall be taken by States, the representation from each State having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the States, and a majority of all the States shall be necessary to a choice. In every case, after the choice of the President, the person having the greatest number of votes of the electors shall be the Vice-president. But if there should remain two or more who have equal votes, the Senate shall choose from them by ballot the Vice-president.

"The Congress may determine the time of choosing the electors, and the day on which they shall give their votes: which day shall be the same throughout the United States."

"In pursuance of the authority given by the latter clause," says Mr. Justice Story, "Congress in 1792 passed an act, declaring that the electors shall be appointed in each State within thirty-four days preceding the first Wednesday in

December, in every fourth year succeeding the last election of President, according to the apportionment of representatives and senators then existing. The electors chosen are required to meet and give their votes on the first said Wednesday of December, in every fourth year succeeding the last election of President, according to the apportionment of representatives and senators then existing. The electors chosen are required to meet and give their votes on the said first Wednesday of December, at such place in each State as shall be directed by the legislature thereof. They are then to make and sign three certificates of all the votes by them given, and to seal up the same, certifying on each that a list of the votes of such State for President and Vice-president is contained therein; and shall appoint a person to take charge of and deliver one of the same certificates to the President of the Senate at the seat of Government, before the first Wednesday of January then next ensuing; another of the certificates is to be forwarded forthwith by the post-office to the President of the Senate at the seat of Government; and the third is to be delivered to the judge of the district in which the electors assembled. Other auxiliary provisions are made by the same act for the due transmission and preservation of the electoral votes, and authenticating the appointment of the electors. The President's term of office is also declared to commence on the fourth day of March next succeeding the day on which the votes of the electors shall be given."

The details of these arrangements are involved, but their purpose was simple. The framers wished the President to be chosen, not by the primary electors, but by a body of secondary electors, whom the primary were to choose, because they thought that these chosen choosers would presumably be persons especially likely to make a good choice. They likewise intended that an absolute majority (a majority, that is, of more than one-half of the total number) should be requisite for a valid election; and if such majority could not be procured, that the House of Representatives, voting by States, should make the choice (in which case an absolute majority of all the States was likewise to be necessary); and lastly, they

wished that an interval of many months—from November in one year to March in the next—should be secured for the safe transaction of the entire election.

Every part of this well-studied arrangement has produced most unanticipated results, and none more so than the last part. Nothing could be more reasonable than the regulation that a long interval should be provided for the whole complicated election; since, if the choice unexpectedly lapsed to the House of Representatives, much delay and consideration would obviously be necessary. But the consequences have been disastrous.

"At the outset of the quarrel," observes a recent writer, "the Constitution occasioned a needless danger. The South threatened to secede because Mr. Lincoln had been elected President. Under almost any other free Constitution which has ever existed, and certainly under every good one, the executive authority, whose function it was to oppose secession, would have been placed exclusively in the hands of those who were desirous so to oppose it. At an instant of violent irritation, the dissentient minority were anxious to break loose from the control of the majority. The majority were at that time, whatever may be the case now, by no means fanatical, or irritated, or overbearing. They wished to preserve the Union, and under a well-framed constitution they would have had the power of using the force of the State to preserve the State. But not so under the American. An artificial arrangement prolongs the reign of each President many months after the election of his successor. In consequence, the executive authority was, during a considerable and critical interval, in the hands of those who by birth, habit, and sympathy were leagued with the dissentient minority. Mr. Buchanan and his ministers had always been attached to the party of the South, and were the last persons to act decisively against it. It is the opinion of many well-informed persons that there was a sufficient Unionist party in several of the seceding States to have prevented the present movement there, if the Federal Government had acted with vigour and celerity. And, whether this be so or not, it remains a singular defect in

the working of the American Constitution, that it gave power at the decisive moment to those least likely to use that power well—that just when a revolt was impending, it placed the whole executive influence and the whole military force in the unfettered hands of the political associates of the revolters."

It is now known that the Southern officials, purposely distributed the fleet of the Union in distant countries, placed stores of artillery where Southern rebels could easily take them, purposely disorganised the Federal army. Nothing else could be anticipated from an arrangement which placed the preparations for maintaining the Union in the exclusive control of the persons desirous to break the Union.

The scheme, too, of a double election has failed of its intended effect; but has produced grave effects which were not intended. The same writer observes:

"Nor does the accession of Mr. Lincoln place the executive power precisely where we should wish to see it. At a crisis such as America has never before seen, and as it is not, perhaps, probable she will see again, the executive authority should be in the hands of one of the most tried, trusted, and experienced statesmen of the nation. Mr. Lincoln is a nearly unknown man, who has been but little heard of, who has had little experience, who may have nerve and judgment, or may not have them, whose character, both moral and intellectual, is an unknown quantity, who must, from his previous life and defective education, be wanting in the liberal acquirements and mental training which are principal elements of an enlarged statesmanship. Nor is it true to say that the American people are to blame for this—that they chose Mr. Lincoln, and must endure the pernicious results. The Constitution is as much to blame as the people, probably even more so. The framers were wisely and warmly attached to the principles of liberty, and, like all such persons, were extremely anxious to guard against momentary gusts of popular opinion. They were especially desirous that the President to whom they were intrusting vast power should be the representative, not of a small section of the community, but of a really predominant part of it. They not only established a system of

double election, in the hope that the 'electoral college' (of which the electors were chosen by the primary electors in each State) would exercise a real discretion in the choice of President, and be some check on popular ignorance and low violence, but they likewise provided that an absolute majority of that 'electoral college' (a majority, that is, greater than one-half of the whole) should give their votes for the elected candidate. The effect has been painfully different from the design. In reality, the 'electoral college' exercises no choice; every member of it is selected by the primitive constituency because he will vote for a certain presidential candidate (for Mr. Lincoln or Mr. Douglas, and so on), and he does nothing but vote accordingly. The provision requiring the consent of an absolute majority has had a still worse effect; it has not been futile, for it has been pernicious. It has made it very difficult to secure any election."[1]

If every candidate stood who wished, and every elector voted for whom he pleased, there would be no election at all. Each little faction would vote for its own particular favourite, and no one would obtain the votes of half the whole nation. A very complicated apparatus of preliminary meetings, called caucuses, is therefore resorted to, and the working of these is singularly disastrous.

Every man of any mark in the whole nation has many enemies, some private, some public; he is probably the head of some section or minor party, and that minor party has its own antagonists, its special opponents, who would dislike more than anything else that its head should on a sudden become the head of the State. Every statesman who has been long tried in public life must have had to alienate many friends, to irritate many applicants by necessary refusals, to say many things which are rankling in many bosoms. Every great man creates his own opposition; and no great man, therefore, will ever be President of the United States, except in the rarest and most exceptional cases. The object of "President makers" is to find a candidate who will conciliate the greatest number,

[1] *Economist*, 1st June, 1861.

not the person for whom there is most to be said, but the person against whom there is least to be said. In the English State, there is no great office filled in at all the same way; but in the English Church there is. "Depend on it," said a shrewd banker, not remarkable for theological zeal or scholastic learning, "I would have been Archbishop of Canterbury, if I had been in the Church. Some quiet, tame sort of man is always chosen; and I never give offence to any one." If he did not, he might have been President of the United States. The mode in which all conspicuous merit is gradually eliminated from the list of candidates was well illustrated at the election of Mr. Pierce.

"The candidates on the democratic side were no less than eight: General Cass, Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Douglas, Mr. Marcy, Mr. Butler, Mr. Houston, Mr. Lane, and Mr. Dickenson; all men 'prominently known to their party,' and the three first supported with great enthusiasm by large sections of that party throughout the Union.

"The Convention appointed by the democratic party in each State to decide which among these various candidates should be recommended for their votes at the election, assembled at Baltimore for their first meeting on the 1st of June, 1852. On that day General Cass obtained the greatest number of votes at the first ballot, namely 116, out of the total of 288; but a number far below the requisite majority. A few specimens of the manner in which the votes fluctuated will not be without interest. On the ninth ballot the votes were—Cass, 112; Buchanan, 87; Douglas, 39; Marcy, 28; Butler, 1; Houston, 8; Lane, 13; Dickenson, 1. On the twenty-second ballot—Cass, 33; Douglas, 80; Butler, 24; Lane, 11; Buchanan, 101; Marcy, 25; Housten, 10; Dickenson, 1. On the twenty-ninth ballot—Cass, 27. On the thirty-fifth ballot —Cass, 131; Douglas, 52; Buchanan, 32.

"On this, the sixth day of the meeting (the proceedings of and the scenes in which were fully and somewhat graphically described by the public press of both parties), a new name appeared for the first time upon the lists—that of Mr. Pierce, of New Hampshire, a gentleman well known to his friends as a

lawyer of ability; also as having creditably fulfilled the duties of a member of the House of Representatives, and of the Senate of the United States; better known, however, as having joined the army as a volunteer on the breaking out of the Mexican War, and as having commanded with distinction a brigade in that war, with the rank of General. It will, nevertheless, imply no disrespect towards Mr. Pierce, if I repeat what was the universal expression, according to the public prints, throughout the Union, that no individual in the United States could have been more surprised at Mr. Pierce's nomination for the exalted and responsible office of chief magistrate of the Republic than Mr. Pierce himself. On the thirty-fifth ballot, the first in which Mr Pierce's name appeared, he received 15 votes. On the forty-eight, he received only 55 votes; but on the forty-ninth, the numbers voting for him were 283, out of the total of 288—a vote which five more would have made unanimous.

"Mr. Pierce was accordingly recommended to the democratic Constituencies throughout the Union, and was elected by a considerable majority over his Whig opponent; the numbers being, for Mr. Pierce 1,504,471, and for General Scott 1,283,174."

What worse mode of electing a ruler could by possibility have been selected? If the wit of man had been set to devise a system specially calculated to bring to the head of affairs an incompetent man at a pressing crisis, it could not have devised one more fit; probably it would not have devised one as fit. It almost secures the rejection of tried and trained genius, and almost insures the selection of untrained and unknown mediocrity.

Nor is this the only mode, or even the chief mode, in which the carefully considered provisions of the American Constitution have, in fact, deprived the American people of the guidance and government of great statesmen, just when these were most required. It is not too much to say that, under the American Constitution, there was no opportunity for a great statesman. As we have seen, he had no chance of being chosen President, the artificial clauses of the Constitution, and the natural principles of human nature, have combined to prevent that. Nor is it worth a great man's while to be a President's minister.

This is not because such a minister would be in apparent subordination to the President, who would probably be an inferior man to him—for able men are continually ready to fill subordinate posts under constitutional monarchs, who are usually very inferior men, and even under colonial governors, who are rather inferior men—but because a President's minister has no parliamentary career. As we know, the first member of the Crown is with us the first man in Parliament, and is the ruler of the English nation. In those English colonies which possess popular constitutions, the first minister is the most powerful man in the State—far more powerful than the so-called governor. He is so because he is the accepted leader of the colonial Parliament. In consequence, whenever the English nation, or a free English colony, is in peril, the first man in England, or in the colony, at least the most trusted man is raised at once to the most powerful place in the nation. On the Continent of Europe, the advantage of this insensible machinery is just beginning to be understood. Count Cavour well knew and thoroughly showed how far the power of a parliamentary Premier, supported by a willing and confiding parliament, is superior to all other political powers, whether in despotic governments or in free. The American Constitution, however, expressly prohibits the possibility of such a position. It enacts, " That no person holding any office under the United States shall be a member of either House during his continuance in office ". In consequence, the position of a great parliamentary member who is responsible more or less for the due performance of his own administrative functions, and also of all lesser ones, is in America an illegal one. If a politician has executive authority, he cannot enter Parliament; if he is in Parliament, he cannot possess executive authority. No man of great talents and high ambition has therefore under the Constitution of the United States a proper sphere for those talents, or a suitable vista for that ambition. He cannot hope to be President, for the President is *ex officio* a poor creature; he cannot hope to be, *mutatis mutandis*, an English Premier, to be a Sir R. Peel, or a Count Cavour, for the American law has declared that in the United States there shall be no similar person.

It appears that the Constitution-makers of North America were not unnaturally misled by the political philosophy of their day. It was laid down first that the legislative authority and the executive authority ought to be perfectly distinct; and secondly that in the English Constitution those authorities were so distinct. Both dogmas had slid into accepted axioms, and no one was bold enough to contest them. At that time no speculative politician perfectly comprehended that the essence of the English Constitution resided in the English Cabinet; that so far from the executive power being entirely distinct from the legislative power, the primary motive force, the supreme regulator of every thing, was precisely the same in both. A select committee of the legislature chosen by the legislature is the highest administrative body, and exercises all the powers of the sovereign executive that are tolerated by the law. The advantage of this arrangement, though contrary to a very old philosophical theory, is very great. The whole State will never work in harmony and in vigour while by possibility its two great powers—the power of legislating and the power of acting—can be declared in opposition to one another; and if they are independent, they will very often be in open antagonism, and be always in dread of it when they are not so. No government, it may be safely said, can be so strong as it should be when the enacting legislature and the acting executive are not subjected to a single effectual control.

The framers of the American Constitution did not perceive this cardinal maxim. The admitted theory of that day was that the English Constitution was one of "checks and balances"; and the Americans, who were very willing to take it as their model (the monarchial part excepted), hoped to balance their strong independent legislature by a strong independent executive. They hoped, too, to prevent the introduction into America of that parliamentary corruption—that bribery of popular representatives by money and patronage, which filled so large a space in the thoughts of politicians of the last century, and so large a space in the lives of some of them. But though their intentions were excellent and their reasons plausible, the effect of their regulations has been

pernicious. By keeping the two careers of legislation and of administration distinct, they have rendered the life of a high politician, of a great statesman, aspiring to improve the laws and to regulate the policy of a great country, with them an impossibility. They have divided the greatest department of practical life into two halves, and neither of them is worth a man's having.

We see the effect. There is no body of respected statesmen in America at this moment of their extreme need. It is not a fault that they have no great genius at their head. The few marvellous statesmen of the world are of necessity rare, and are not manufactured to order even by the bidding of an awful crisis. But it is a fault that they have not one or more possible parliamentary cabinets—several sets of trained men, with considerable abilities and known character, whose policy is decided, whose worth is tried, who have cast in their lot for years with certain ideas, whose names are respected in every household through Europe. In consequence of the unfortunate caution of their Constitution-makers, America has no such men; and Italy has them or will soon have them; but after a political experience of seventy years the United States have none. They have existed during two generations as a democracy without ideals; and are likely to die now a democracy without champions.

It is, however, only fair to observe, that the American Constitution has one great excellence at this moment, not indeed, as compared with the English Constitution, but as compared with that degraded imitation of it which exists, for example, in our Australian Colonies. In those governments the parliament is wholly unfit to choose an executive; it has not patriotism enough to give a decent stability to the government; there are "ministerial crises" once a week, and actual changes of administration once a month. The suffrage has been lowered to such a point among the refuse population of the gold colonies, that representative government is there a very dubious blessing, if not a certain and absolute curse. If such a parliament had met in such a crisis as the American Congress lately had to face, it is both possible and probable that no stable administration would

have been formed at all. Every possible ministry would have been tried in succession; and every one would have been rejected in succession. We might have witnessed debates as aimless, as absurd, as unpractical, in their tenor, as those of certain French Parliaments, without the culture and refinement which made the latter more tolerable, though it could not make them more wise.

The American Constitution has at least the merit of preventing this last extreme of political degradation. Having placed Mr. Lincoln, an unknown man, in power, it has at least prevented his being superseded, or its being proposed that he should be superseded by some other equally unknown man. The American Constitution necessitated the choice for the first position at an awful crisis; it has at least settled once for all who he should be; it has compelled a conclusive choice, which an Australian Constitution would not have done.

But with this single item the aid which the American Constitution has given to Mr. Lincoln in his presidency begins and ends. It has put him there, and it has kept him there; but it has done no more. He has had to carry on the government with new subordinates; for at every change of the American President, all the officials, from the cabinet minister to the petty postmaster, are changed. So far from giving him any special powers suitable to a civil war, it authoritatively declares that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; that it shall be illegal "to abridge the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble or to petition for a redress of grievance". It does not permit the punishment of any person, or the confiscation of his property, except after satisfactory proof before a civil tribunal. Even now, at this early state of the civil contest, martial law has been declared in Missouri and *habeus corpus* suspended in Baltimore; the property (slave-property, certainly, but still legal property in America) of Secessionists has been confiscated; the liberty of speech is almost at an end; the liberty of the press has ceased to exist. These last are indeed infractions of the law, not by the administration, but by the mob; it is they, and not Mr.